THE STUDENT'S QURĀN

An Introduction

HASHIM AMIR ALI



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Besides Leonard Elmhirst, who befriended me in my hour of need, and innumerable others, to these earlier translators of the Qurān into English, I am particularly indebted

1 ALEXANDER ROSS

As a memento of the late Ahmad Allauddin I have his rare first edition published in 1649, more than 300 years ago

2 GEORGE SALE

In 1734 appeared his still-famous translation of the Koran In 1736 he died while still in his thirties He said a few unpalatable things about Islam; but otherwise, in those days, he could have found neither patron nor readers, nor could he have lavished praise as he has done

3 J M RODWELL

His first edition in 1861 established a landmark in Qurānic interpretation; it was the first-ever edition actually published with an aim at chronological arrangement

4 E H PALMER

". . very nearly word for word the Holy Qurān in the English language" (Sarwar) His translation in two volumes appeared in 1880 under *The Sacred Books of the East* series

5. ABDUL HAKIM

A little known and hardly available translation which appeared from Patiala in 1905. I have referred to a copy in the Salar Jung Library in Hyderabad.

6 MIRZA ABUL FAZL

His first translation into English, with the Suras arranged according to the sequence suggested by Noeldeke, was published in two volumes with Arabic text and English rendering, both printed in type, in 1910 His last edition of *The Korān in English* appeared in 1955, a year before he passed away in 1956 at the age of 91.

It was he who, 18 years ago, aroused my interest in and reverence for the Qurān

7 MUHAMMAD ALI

The first work published by any Muslim with the thoroughness worthy of Qurānic scholarship and achieving the standards of modern publications He has pacified the orthodox by conforming to tradition in the text of the translation and yet left room for a more liberal translation by giving alternative meanings of words in the margins and foot notes His first edition appeared in 1917. He strongly defends the existing traditional sequence of the Suras.

8 GHULAM SARWAR

In his Introduction he writes a detailed judgment on Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Muhammad Ali. He also gives two Essays on the life of the Prophet He too is strongly opposed to a chronological approach to the study of the Qurān. The Woking Mosque published his translation in 1929

9. ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Orthodox and mystic viewpoint; Homeric style of English translation; summaries in English verse intervening between Arabic text and English translation given in parallel columns Copious notes, appendices and index; published in Lahore in 1930

10 MARMADUKE PICKTHALL

An English Muslim, helped by annotators in Cairo First edition with Arabic text and English translation, entitled *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran,* published under the patronage of the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1930 Published in the Mentor Religious Classics in 1953

11. RICHARD BELL

Translation in two Volumes published in 1929-30 He strongly held the view that Qurānic verses were often in disorder because the compilation had been effected from loose scraps often written on both sides. Suggests innumerable possibilities of rearrangements Often very illuminating in the rendering of words

12 A. J. ARBERRY

A small preliminary volume, *The Holy Koran,* has an illuminating analysis of the different rhythms in the Qurān. The two-volume edition of *The Koran Interpreted,* (1955), facilitates comprehension by breaking up verses into lines of varying length as in English poetry.

13 N J. DAWOOD

Almost a free translation providing easy reading Sequence of Suras changed without any reasons or principle being explained Published in Penguin Classics in 1956

"EACH ONE DOES AFTER HIS OWN MANNER; BUT YOUR LORD BEST KNOWS WHO IS GUIDED ARIGHT IN THE WAY".

Sura XVII, Verse 86

فلا اقتحم العقبة

Why then does Man not choose
the Upward Path ?

(Q 24, XC, 11)

PROLOGUE

The Qurān, in different passages, defines Islām as the simple Faith in the supremity of the One God and the brotherhood of all human communities, a Faith which it claims, was preached by innumerable Messengers of God throughout man's history But the religion which so exclusively and emphatically insisted on the recognition of this principle, or Islam as we think of it to-day, is a compartively new star in the galaxy of historic religions Judaism, Vedantism, Confucianism, Buddhism and even Christianity were several centuries old when Islam was preached by Mohammad in the early seventh Century This new Prophet was born in 570; he was entrusted with Prophethood in 610 when he was forty years old; after having built up a Faith and a state based on it, he passed away in 632 of the Christian era. The Qurān embodies the revelations to the Apostle during these twenty-three years

'The Word of God'

Every people, according to the Qurān, has its scripture To many of them these scriptures are the Word of God, even to the others, their sacredness is equivalent to that of the Word of God in all cases they are inspired by something higher than the ordinary intelligence of man

The Mahabhārata, the *Rāmayāna*, the *Old Testament,* all these we know are narrative records of ancient peoples interlaced with the almost imperceptible threads of universal truths and abiding moral precepts The *Old Testament,* for example, is the work of numerous scribes whose identity is lost behind the veil of anonymity The commandments of God or those ascribed to Him are quoted by some human agency "Thus saith the Lord"—it is a Prophet or Sage, Scribe or Disciple who is recording in the scripture what God has revealed to him or to some one else under some particular circumstances The book in its entirety is not the word of God· but because the words of God, or words inspired by Him, are reported therein, it amounts to the Word or Book of God

The case of the *Gita* is identical Its opening chapter defines its limitations Sanjaya is looking into his palm and is reporting to Dhritarashtra what he sees and learns of the battle at Kurukshetra. The dialogue between Krishna and Arjun—the divine charioteer expounding philosophical truths to the human seeker—is being recorded through the medium of *another* human intelligence But so bright is the effulgence of this dialogue that the human medium is lost in the dazzle The entire narrative assumes the magnitude of the Word of God

So also with the *New Testament* Even the earliest of the Gospels were written at least forty years after Jesus and are clearly ascribed to particular disciples and others. Few would claim that these Gospels are in their entirety the words of God But because they deal with the activities and sayings and injunctions of a divinely-inspired individual, the *New Testament* as a whole assumes the dimensions of the Word of God

The form in which the Word of God is manifested in the *Qurān* is somewhat different No disciple or scribe is involved Even the narrative part is moulded by Divine inspiration. All stories of the *Qurān* more or less assume a familiarity with these stories on the part of the community that is addressed. These narratives, some of which are to be found in the *Old Testament* as narratives, are here used only as parables to clarify some moral principle; but all language on the part of a third person is eliminated. Every word of the *Qurān* is the record of divine inspiration reported by the inspired individual himself There is only God and His Apostle No third person intervenes Quotation marks are seldom necessary For it is not only certain parts that are injunctions; the entire text consists of the divine inspiration revealed to the heart of the Apostle The *Qurān*, in other words, is the Word of God in a more literal sense

The Seed within the Husk

The seeds enclosed within each scripture consist of universal and eternal truths But these truths have to be presented to different peoples in their respective frames of reference. All communities are the products of the human element functioning in time and particular environments Each differs from the other in the make-up and

background of mind and pattern of thought Eternal truths, therefore, have to be presented to each community according to its respective social memory

Thus all scriptures consist of the small seeds of the same eternal truths wrapped in less or more sheathing according to the requirements of time and space The principles are the same, the language, the examples, the stories through which these principles can be imparted naturally vary according to variations in human groupings These stories, these metaphors, these allegories, these parables, all constitute only the chaff protecting the seed of truth and intended to provide for the seeds being carried far and finding fertile soil The vociferous votaries of each particular religion are only the frustrated individuals who get entangled in the wrappings and fail to reach the inner kernels of truth

The Qurān has come to mankind through the Arabs of the seventh century Therefore, its universal and eternal truths are naturally sheathed in local legends and folklore of the Seventh-century Arabs We can only get glimpses of them in so far as they were manifested in the circumstances of the Apostle's life In other words, we cannot arrive at these truths without knowing something of the life and personality of Mohammad, the circumstances in which the Qurān was revealed and the background of the Arab peoples Only by carefully setting aside this wrapping can we reach the inner seed or kernel of the universal truths deeply and firmly imbedded in the entire message This is perhaps the essential meaning of the famous verse of the Qurān explaining the difference between the *muhkamāt* and the *mutashābihāt* (III · 5)—the truths and the similes.

The 'Trilemma'

Fortunate are those who can read and understand the original Arabic of the Qurān For they need neither translation nor commentary With a little thought they can separate the grain from the sheath, the truth from the simile, the eternal from the transient, the universal from the local. But such are few.

The vast majority of mankind is unfamiliar with the Arabic language Islam with its original basis in the Qurān, has spread

far beyond the geographical limits of the Arabic language When countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, China and parts of Russia and south eastern Europe are taken into account, the Arabs constitute less than a fifth of the World's Muslim population. For all these others the message of the Qurān can only be carried either by teaching them the Arabic language or by presenting to them the Qurān in a language which they can understand

There are, unfortunately, difficulties in both alternatives Learning Arabic may be a relatively easy process if only acquaintance with its speech and writing are aimed at But mastering Arabic to the extent of being able to understand the Qurān is no easy task Even twenty years' effort on the part of a non-Arab is not considered enough to justify a man claiming to understand all the niceties of the Qurān. He cannot be expected to have the capacity of seeing through the sheaths of metaphor and allegory and thus reaching the essence or kernel of the divine teaching

On the other hand all translations into other languages are inadequate The most candid of those who have made the attempt confess that the Qurān cannot really be translated The most eloquent of those who have made such confessions is perhaps H A R Gibb, who has explained the difficulty in such lucid terms that an extensive quotation will not be irrelevant:

> " the Koran is essentially untranslatable. The seer can never communicate his vision in ordinary language He can express himself only in broken images, every inflection of which, every nuance and subtlety, has to be long and earnestly studied before their significance breaks upon the reader—images, too, in which the music of the sounds plays an indefinable part in attuning the mind of the hearer to receive the message To paraphrase them in other words, can only be to mutilate them, to substitute clay for fine gold, the plodding of the pedestrian intelligence for the winged flight of intuitive perception . . .
>
> "An English translation of the Koran must employ precise and often arbitrary terms for the many-faceted and jewel-like phrases of the Arabic; and the more literal it is, the grayer and more colourless it must be In passages of plain narrative, legislation and the like, the loss may be less great, although not

only the unevenness and the incohesions of the compilation but also the fine shades, the hammer strokes and the eloquent phrases (if they can be reproduced at all) may have a disconcerting, or as Carlyle said, "a crude and incondite" effect Even in so simple a sentence as "We give life and death and unto Us is the journeying" it is *impossible to present in English (or perhaps* any other language) the force of the five-times-repeated "We" in *the* six words *of* the original (L : 42) Allowing for all this, however, we shall still not grasp what the Koran means to *the Arab until we make an effort to appreciate the part that* language plays in determining the psychological attitude"*

This superb analysis needs no further comment But against this two-way difficulty of reaching the essence of the Qurān either through learning Arabic or through translations, stands the colossal urge to reach this essence however difficult the way Never before have the millions of Muslims, scattered over all Asia and in other continents, been more anxious to know the basic tenets of the religion of their fathers. Never before have so many non-Muslims been anxious to understand the fundamentals of Islam along with those of other religions The entire world of to-day, faced with the successes and dangers of science, is yearning to reconcile the materialistic aspect of life with the spiritual Man everywhere is groping for the essential truths amidst the plethora of scriptures Unless he can reconcile the physical sciences with spiritual truths he is doomed Unless he can add reverence to his knowledge he is lost

The adequate presentation of the Qurān thus brings us face to face not with a dilemma but a trilemma

The Only Solution

Amidst this din and confusion, hopes and fears, frustrations and aspirations, every individual is called upon to bring to the forum of humanity whatever little he can bring as an offering On those who think, rightly or wrongly, that they have had a glimpse of the essential message and the universal and eternal truths as revealed in

* H A R Gibb *Modern Trends in Islam,* 1945 pp 3-4

the Qurān, lies the responsibility of presenting it as seen by them. Such presentation may not corroborate the truth as seen by others—the many-faceted nature of truth itself precludes this possibility—but that should not be a deterrent. Perhaps each reader will find a grain of truth in the bushel of what the other has presented as an offering That alone he should take; the rest he may discard in a spirit of charity and tolerance for human weakness and error. The main criterion by which such attempts should be judged is sincerity of motive Honest doubt, we must remember, is better than feigned belief or praise without conviction.

During the past one thousand years, hundreds of people have tried to convey the message of the Qurān by translating it into numerous languages; but, strangely enough, there is not a single instance of more than one person having attempted a joint translation! The explanation, perhaps, lies in the fact that all those who have studied the Qurān have realized deep in their hearts, that to claim a unanimity of understanding which a joint translation even by only two persons would imply, was too great a responsibility for any person or persons to assume. In other words, it has been felt that allowing each person to present the Qurān, either in translation or in commentary, *as he sees it,* and leaving the text itself untouched, was the only way of preserving for the original its pristine freshness and authenticity. It therefore follows that no translation into any other language and no commentary even in Arabic claims, or could claim, to be anything but an individual interpretation not to be accepted as anything more authoritative

So it seems that a solution of the trilemma has been in the process of evolution for the past millenium In the English language, for example, we find that the first translation of the Qurān, by Alexander Ross, appeared as late as 1649, that is a thousand years after the original revelation or in the eleventh century of Islam George Sale followed in less than a hundred years, with his translation first published in 1736, that is, in Islam's twelfth century. Rodwell and Palmer added two translations of the Qurān in Islam's thirteenth century And the current fourteenth century of the Islamic era can already boast of at least ten translations. A few more may be added before the century comes to an end

It is in this multiplicity alone that lies the solution to our three-sided problem. Let us welcome the appearance of more and more translations, each profiting from the achievements of its predecessors and thus coming nearer and nearer to the spirit and flavour of the original but *never claiming to represent it perfectly.* Here alone lies our salvation.

The Background and Personality of Mohammad

In the Qurān, as has been mentioned already, no third person intervenes by way of disciple or narrator The entire contents are a series of monologues transmitted from the all-pervading, eternal Being to a human personality—that of Mohammad who so clearly and unequivocally defines himself as *Rasūl Allāh*, the messenger of God, and nothing more He claimed to be no more than a man like the rest of his fellow beings—only one chosen, along with several others in different times and amidst different peoples, to convey the divine message to mankind

The first essential to an understanding of the Qurān, therefore, is to learn all that we can about the personality of Mohammad The clearer the picture the better will we be able to understand his inspired utterances Let us therefore, even in this brief Prologue, try to form in our minds as clear an idea as we can of the personality and background of the man whose name has reverberated amidst mankind for thirteen hundred years

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, arose in the Arabian Peninsula lying in the centre of three continents. More specifically it had its birth in Mecca, a town which, though of comparatively little significance in itself, was situated at the cross roads of trade by sea and land It was not a port but it contained an ancient temple known as the *Ka'ba* (literally, a Cube) to which people flocked from far and near on two occasions of the year known as the *Ḥajj-i-Asghar* and *Ḥajj-i-Akbar*, the small and the great gatherings.

The Qurān informs us that this temple had been built to the honour of the One God by Abraham Arcahaeology and ancient history do not deny this but suggest that this Prophet Abraham was an ancient seer whose object in raising this cubical structure was perhaps to illustrate the uniform Laws of the One God as manifested

in the movement of the sun and the moon, the planets and the stars We find that this cube, the Ka'ba, is oriented 20 degrees to the west of the present true north; and, strangely enough, the Pyramid of Gaza too has an almost identical orientation It is therefore surmised that this Ka'ba too is as old, probably older than, the Pyramid. The Qurān calls it the most ancient of structures built for the glorification of God and this has been contradicted neither by research nor conjecture

The origin of the two annual gatherings too is lost in the hoary past but it is suggested that they probably synchronized in ancient times with the two equinoxes in spring and autumn Certain other details afford peculiar corroboration to this thesis but even if the Ka'ba was an ancient monument for astronomical observations and the two Hajj were intended to celebrate the equinoxes, so many centuries had passed since its construction that, owing to the gradually increasing orienation, effected by the precession of the equinoxes, the structure was no longer capable of serving the purpose for which it was originally constructed The three hundred and sixty *degrees* had become merely that number of idols and the names given to stars and planets, like *Lāt* and *Manāt* and *'Uzza,* had become godesses around whom had been built up a large store of mythology and superstition.

But all this is merely to indicate the misty past which enveloped the Ka'ba and the annual pilgrimages, both of which have played, and still play, so integral a role in the history and culture of Islam For our present purposes it need only be noted that the family of Bani Hāshim were closely associated with the maintenance of this Ka'ba 'Abdul Muttalib and Abu Tālib, who succeeded him as the patriarch of the Bani Hāshim, were, respectively, the grandfather and uncle of Mohammad the Apostle

So much for the background of time and space and family. But other factors too moulded the personality of this great historical figure who was to preach Islam

When great lives are viewed in retrospect it appears as if the minutest circumstances—from birth and even before, to death and even after—were all carefully planned by an inexorable Destiny which goes by many names

Suffering in infancy, or perhaps while in the maternal womb, appears to be the first sign of God applying the chisel for the production of a masterpiece. Moses must have suffered the misery which was his mother's when relinquishing him to the reeds in the stream Jesus, born in a stable, or under a palm tree, must have suffered his mother's lonely anguish Did Mohammad, still in his mother's womb, suffer the pangs of sorrow which his mother experienced at widowhood while he was still unborn?

Who can picture to himself the anguish of the boy of six when, on a desert journey, he must have witnessed the helpless look of agony in his mother's eyes when she too was leaving this orphan to the mercy of a callous world?

Such excruciating experiences defeat the weak and make them callous and cruel in later life They only strengthen the strong and make them reflective and compassionate when they grow up to youth and manhood

Mohammad finds himself fatherless and motherless but loved by his grandfather 'Abdul Muttalib Soon he too dies and the child, bereaved for the third time, finds shelter with his uncle Abu Ṭālib, who also learns to love him dearly

At the age of twelve he journeys with this uncle to Syria and impresses Abu Tālib's acquaintances with his demeanor and sagacity While he is still in his teens, he is a member of a small group of young men pledged to help the needy and befriend the helpless Before he is twenty-five he has tactfully averted a clash between clans when the controversy raged as to who should place the Black Stone in the Ka'ba, then under reconstruction· he places the stone in a sheet which is lifted together by the representatives of different tribes and then himself boldly adjusts its position in the wall A childish quarrel, no doubt; but one characteristic of the simple Arabs and settled with characteristic simplicity. For his forthrightness he has acquired among them the title of *Amīn*, the Trustworthy

When twenty-five, he is chosen by a well-to-do lady to lead her caravan of merchandise to Syria and returns after a successful commercial venture Correlation of her age with that of her daughter Fātima, does not support the tradition that she was as much as fifteen years his senior, but, presumably, she was older than he was

She knew well what she was about when, fully aware that her wealth and beauty could have secured for her any man among her people, she chose the penniless Mohammad whose social status was only that of an orphaned relative of the great Bani Hāshim

For fifteen years after this marriage little is known of his life and activity Is it reasonable to suppose that, having made a successful trade journey when he was twenty-five, he sat at home during the next fifteen years lazing on his wife's resources? Is it not much more logical to suppose that he travelled north and south with the caravans of summer and winter originally organized by his own forefathers?

Where did he go? Mecca was on the trade route for goods from China, India, the African coast in the south and Damascus and Constantinople in the north Arab merchants sailed to Zanzibar and Calicut by sea The silk road extended into Iran, Tibet, China Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Hindu monks and priests traversed the long roads between Aryavarta and Egypt Constantinople was the seat of Eastern Christianity, which rivalled in authority and splendour the court of the Khusros at Ctesiphon Yemen had been governed in turn by Ethiopeans, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians and therefore presented layer upon layer of different cultures And Yemen was an annual goal of the Meccan caravans.

What were all the things Mohammad saw? Who were all the people of different background that he met? How much and how deeply did he think? Tradition is silent on all these points But must we interpret this silence as a void? Unless we are determined to present him as inert to external stimuli—and what we know of him over-rules such a presentation—can we not be reasonably certain that he travelled extensively, inquired diligently so that his personality developed throughout this long period of mature existence?

Was he really illiterate? If so, what did his illiteracy amount to? Did he engage successfully in trade without knowing how to add and subtract and multiply? Did he carry on successful negotiations of a commercial nature without knowing how to decipher the alphabet? Anyway, what did illiteracy mean in those days when literacy itself was scorned?

The belief that he was illiterate is based upon a particular

interpretation of a word, *ummi*, in the Qurān But are we sure that while almost all other words have more than one meaning, the one word *ummi*, can mean only illiterate? Are we not, in fact, aware that the word does have other meanings and that 'native' or 'locally born' fits into the particular context with equal if not more facility? Are we to use our common-sense in choosing one out of two interpretations, or are we to make our common-sense conform to a particular interpretation without question?

This intelligent, presentable, honest, respected and, above all, intensely sincere man reaches the age of forty The tumultuous years of youth are over. He has been a faithful husband content with one wife in a society in which polygamy is the rule And in his austerity he is used to spending several days and nights in the little cavity on the top of a solitary rock protruding from a plain and overlooking a vast panorama extending under clear skies even to the sea, forty miles towards the setting sun This is how the personality has been carved for the man who receives the Call.

The rest of his biography must be studied with the Qurān itself

The Three Stages of Quranic Revelation

So much for the personality of God's Messenger. Let us now turn to the nature and development of the Message itself

It is a well-known fact that the traditional sequence of the Qurānic text is neither chronological nor subject-wise The learned divine or scholar, or *hāfiz*, who knows the whole Qurān by heart in the traditional sequence, may not need to be shown which parts came first and which were revealed later But the vast majority of those who are interested in understanding the Qurān have necessarily to take recourse to some kind of chronological order, however tentative that may be Without such a sequence it is impossible for the layman to grasp the essence of this revered scripture

Mohammad received his first revelation when he was forty years old He died when he was sixty-three years old and the contents of the Qurān consist of intermittent revelations spread over all these twenty-three years One of the explanations of the effectiveness of his teaching in obtaining the immediate and enthusiastic response

of his followers, ever growing in number, was that every verse of those revelations was promulgated at what we now call the psychological moment. The nature of his following was continuously evolving and the circumstances too changed from indifference to antagonism and through periods of peace and war, ostracism and relentment. Throughout these variations the revelations were such as to meet the needs of the moment but *without deviating from the basic and unalterable truths.* In other words, the same lesson is taught, the same injunctions are conveyed but the tone and the rhythm have changed to suit the particular circumstances. The passages revealed in times of peace are as persuasive as the gentle breeze. Those revealed in times of war are as awesome as drums of battle Unless we have some means of distinguishing the period and the circumstances in which a particular passage is revealed, we may understand the meaning of its words but its spirit will often elude us

From this point of view the contents of the Qurān are most naturally classified into three more or less distinct periods:

(*a*) The first period covers the five years of the Mission when the essentials of the universal faith, revealed by earlier Prophets but forgotten and overlooked, were re-emphasized This was the period when a small group of followers was forming a cluster around him Almost from the very beginning, however, this re-emphasis of the true values and rejection of false idols and ideals began to arouse antagonism. Everyone who rallied to the standard of the new insistence served to increase the chagrin of the others. So the Suras of this period extending up to the time of the first emigration of Mohammad's followers to Abyssinia, have characteristics which are different from those of the other two later periods. They are brief, more replete with rhyme and assonance, more capable of being memorized The 52 Suras out of a total of 114 constitute only a tenth of the whole Qurānic text

(*b*) Then come the Suras revealed in the second phase of the Mission extending over a period of eight years ending with the final emigration of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina This was the period of violent questioning and severe malignment, molestation and ostracism. The Prophet's

insistence upon the essentials and the unbending nature of the new teaching as far as basic principles were concerned, evoked an equally stubborn opposition and there was no alternative but to hammer away, like a patient goldsmith, at the same lessons over and over again, each time from a different view-point and with the help of different examples from the historical experience of the Arabs themselves This portion consists of about sixty per cent of the Qurānic text and it is in this portion that repetition and reiteration are most prevalent Despite the gems of rare literary beauty and moral weight which are to be found interspersed throughout even this portion, it is difficult to reconcile one's self to this repetition, over and over again, of the stories of Abraham and Moses, *'Ād* and *Thamūd* and several others, unless one realizes that the circumstances themselves called for such repetition; and inspiration was continuously fashioning the vehicle of language by which the essential truths could be got across to the masses and made for them a living reality

(*c*) The last of the three periods covers all the ten years of Mohammad's Mission in Medina His steadfast efforts and his bitter sufferings over the preceding thirteen years in Mecca have at last made him a revered leader in Medina He is now the acknowledged new Prophet to a community effective in number and influence It was now time not only to teach the essential truths but to frame a code of conduct leading to the good life of the community that had accepted the essential truths preached over the previous thirteen years

The Suras revealed in this period cover the remaining thirty per cent of the Qurān and were revealed amidst the many cares of state with which the little community was beset Enemies had to be curbed, true followers encouraged, the hypocrites warned against and the tardy invited to join the brotherhood of faith Codes of conduct had to be framed with regard to women and slaves, the old and the young, the Muslims and the non-Muslims A community fund had to be built up, marriages and divorces regulated Naturally the revelations of this period have a different flavour, tone and content Each of these three periods, if it is to be fully appreciated, has to be studied by itself.

The Student's Quran

The *Student's* Qurān, therefore, consists of three Books or volumes and to distinguish one from the other these three portions have been assigned the names of *Al-qurān, Al-furqān* and *Al-kitāb* respectively All these words have been used for the Qurān as a whole in the Qurān itself, and to give the general sense in which these words are applied here it may be assumed that the first stands for *Annunciation,* the second for *Clarification* and the third for *Legislation*—in other words, the three portions consist of *Principles, Precedents* and *Precepts* respectively

How the Qurānic text as a whole has been grouped into these three categories, the basis on which each Sura has been assigned to one or the other of these three books, involves a discussion which is both too technical and too elaborate to be presented in this introductory volume Suffice it to say that *each Sura has been kept intact* without the slightest disturbance of its contents. All that has been done is to group the Suras according to the three periods in which they were revealed The first part contains 52 Suras which gradually increase in size and are generally accepted as the earliest revelations. The second part consists of the 40 Suras revealed in the second explanatory period The third part contains the remaining 22 Suras revealed at Medina The Notes and comments figure most prominently in the first part, least in the second part and are restricted to particularly important passages in the third Together the three parts constitute three volumes of about equal size

How the Suras in each of the three sections have been arranged among themselves is another problem which can be touched upon only briefly. The present introductory volume contains only the first 25 Suras of Volume I, but the basis on which these twenty-five Suras have been arranged has been shown on page xxiii and this basis, clarified further in the Notes to the Suras themselves, applies to the arrangement of all the 114 Suras of the Qurān It is sufficient to add here that the basic principle followed is to leave the traditional grouping undisturbed unless internal evidence makes it incumbent to break the sequence in the interests of understanding

But here again a point needs to be emphasized Such chronological grouping is necessary only for the uninitiated who want to

understand the essential message of the Qurān And this is no new procedure A grouping of this kind has, in fact, been in vogue for centuries· the Qurānic teaching of all Muslim children begins with the last of the traditional thirty sections in which the chronologically earlier Suras of the Qurān are to be found Likewise there exist several publications of the Qurānic contents classifying the entire text according to subject matter, alphabetical beginnings of verses and so on Therefore, the publication of a translation of the Qurān, for students, both mature and immature, with Suras arranged in chronological order is in no way a deviation from tradition. It does not suggest a rearrangement of the Qurān itself: for in the interest of authenticity and proper reference, the traditional sequence, like the original text, must for ever be kept intact

A Plea for Co-operation

The days when individuals accomplished Herculean tasks all by themselves is over The niceties and technique of writing today, especially in a field such as this, are so exacting that no individual can succeed without the help of several others And the purpose behind the publication of this small introductory volume is just to invite such help If the triple thesis presented earlier in this Prologue, along with the possible solution of encouraging a multiplicity of translations embodying individual interpretations is accepted, then it becomes the duty of all those who accept that thesis to help and encourage such efforts.

To familiarize people with new pathways without however advocating the abandonment of the old highways is no easy task To point out a new road can be so easily mistaken for the condemnation of another The attempt of one person to submit a chronological study can so readily be misrepresented by another as an attempt to mislead the *Ummah,* the Muslim community, from the traditional sequence These are not the intentions or objectives of The *Student's* Qurān It is, on the contrary, merely a student's attempt to share with other students of the Qurān his findings along a less trodden path Just as he has the duty to share his experiences with fellow-students, scattered the world over, so also he has the right to ask that they share with him their reactions to his presentation.

Finally, I have a request to make the reader: Do not be upset at any particular passage or sentence when you come across it for the first time It is only human nature to react adversely to anything new; such reactions are Nature's mechanism for the preservation of what exists But change and evolution too are inherent in God's creation.

> Old order changeth yielding place to new
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world

Therefore, read through the few pages of this small volume curbing your first reactions and not even making any notes. And then, when reading it for the second time, certainly make notes and let me know of the words or lines or passages that still displease you and which you would like to see altered in a second edition if there is one But when you write, and I pray you will, do not, please, forget to mention that the criticisms or suggestions are the outcome of a *second* reading, otherwise, as you will readily agree, criticism born of the initial reactions is hardly deserving of serious consideration

You may be a believer or a pagan, a non-Muslim or a Muslim, one who is learned in Arabic or one who is an entire stranger to that language In any case your having read so far indicates that you are a fellow-student interested in understanding the Qurān As your fellow-student, therefore, may I expect from you an honest, carefully thought out, and above all, *constructive* criticism of the initial part of The *Student's* Qurān presented in this introductory volume?

Chronological Placement of Early Qurānic Suras
(See explanatory notes below)

Columns Number												
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Q 1	XCVI	*'Alaq*	2	19	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1
Q. 2	XCVII	*Qadr*	1	5	1	3	3	2	3	3	6	1
Q 3	XCIX	*Zalzalah*	1	8	1	10	10	3	1	1	1	1
Q 4	C	*'Ādiyāt*	1	11	1	2	2	3	4	1	1	1
Q 5	CI	*Qāri'ah*	1	11	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	2
Q 6	CII	*Takāthur*	1	8	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2
Q 7	CIII	*'Asr*	1	3	1	2	2	3	3	1	1	2
Q 8	CIV	*Humaza*	1	9	1	3	3	1	2	1	1	2
Q. 9	CV	*Fīl*	1	5	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1
Q. 10	CVI	*Quraish*	1	4	1	3	3	1	2	1	1	1
Q 11	CVII	*Mā'ūn*	1	7	2	2	2	1	2	4	1	3
Q 12	CVIII	*Kauthar*	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	8
Q 13	CIX	*Kāfirūn*	1	6	2	2	2	5	1	4	10	11
Q 14	CX	*Nasr*	1	3	2	11	12	12	12	3	12	3
Q 15	CXI	*Lahab*	1	5	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	9
Q 16	CXII	*Ikhlās*	1	4	2	3	3	5	1	3	10	1
Q. 17	CXIII	*Falaq*	1	5	2	2	2	5	1	2	4	1
Q 18	CXIV	*Nās*	1	6	2	2	2	5	1	10	4	2
Q 19	XCV	*Tīn*	1	8	2	3	3	2	3	1	2	3
Q 20	XCIV	*Sharh*	1	8	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1
Q 21	XCIII	*Duhā*	1	11	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	1
Q 22	XCII	*Lail*	1	21	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Q 23	XCI	*Shams*	1	15	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	2
Q 24	XC	*Balad*	1	20	3	4	4	2	2	2	2	2
Q 25	LXXXIX	*Fajr*	1	30	3	1	1	4	5	2	2	2

Column No 1 Serial Number of Sura according to Chronological order
" " 2 Traditional Sequence Number in *'Uthmānian* recension
" " 3 Name of Sura generally used
" " 4 Number of *Ruku'* in each Sura
" " 5 Number of Verses in each Sura
" " 6 Serial No of DECAD according to this Arrangement
" " 7 " " " " " " As Suyuti
" " 8 " " " " " " Egyptian Reckoning
" " 9 " " " " " " Noeldeke
" " 10 " " " " " " Rodwell
" " 11 " " " " " " Muir
" " 12 " " " " " " Grimm
" " 13 " " " " " " Ajmal Khan

Notes

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Bismillāh ir Rahmān ir Rahīm

'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful'. That is the accepted and literal translation of the above formula with which the Suras of the Qurān begin.

Qurānic commentary is not unanimous as to whether this prescribed exordium is itself a part of the Divine revelation or whether it has been enjoined by the Prophet as a prelude to the recitation of the Divine messages. In any case this invariable opening is rightly regarded as a scintillating diadem worthy of an honoured place above every setting of Qurānic gems

Well-nigh volumes have been written on the significance of each word in this brief opening A great deal has been read even in the first letter of the alphabet with which it begins and the width of meaning which the words *Rahmān* and *Rahīm* cover in describing the attributes of Divinity have been explained copiously in numerous commentaries

While the serious Muslim student will find much about this formula in these commentaries worthy of thought and study, the following aspect of this prelude is likely to appeal particularly to the seekers after universalism:

Allāh was the word for the Supreme Deity among the Arabs even before Mohammad The fact that his own father's name was 'Abdullāh suffices to confirm this In

other words, the pagan Arabs too believed in the existence of a Supreme Being: but they did not believe in Him exclusively; they recognized other minor deities as well. The basic emphasis of Islam was the negation of this *Shirk*, this dilution of Divine Supremity by the association of others with it.

La ilāha il ALLĀH

'No deity is there except THE DEITY' That was the great proclamation.

But if that was all that Islam wanted to emphasize, it would have been sufficient to limit the exordium to *Bismillāh*—In the name of THE DEITY. Why were the words, *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm* added?

It is true that these words, literally meaning 'the Beneficent, the Merciful' are the attributes of the Supreme Deity, but the Supreme Deity or Allāh has many other attributes as well No less than ninety-nine of them are believed to be mentioned in the Qurān. Why then are these two, which are almost synonymous, given so much prominence almost at the risk of redundance? Surely His One-ness is given even more prominence in the rest of the Qurān.

One explanation is that, apart from being attributes of Allāh, these words, *Rahmān* and *Raḥīm* were also *names* of the Supreme Deity used by the Nestorian Christians and the Jews respectively. There is specific evidence with regard to *Rahmān* and the frequent mention of 'The Most Merciful' in the Jewish prayers even of today makes it reasonable to assume that this title is a translation of *Raḥīm*

In other words, while *La ilāha il Allāh*, 'No deity is there except THE DEITY' negates the pagan association of minor deities, *Bismillāh ir Raḥmān ir Raḥīm* affirms the exclusive recognition of the Supreme Being by the other Monotheistic religions as well. In this sense its meaning could be expanded to be:

> In the name of *Allāh*, (the Supreme Deity of the Arabs, who is known as) the *Raḥmān* (by the Christians and as) the *Raḥīm* (by the Jews)

Dozens of verses in the Qurān confirm this attitude of recognizing the monotheism of the Christians and the Jews even when the contemporary devotees of these two great religions are condemned for their deviation from the basic tenets common to all

There is one further hypothesis regarding this opening formula which a student has to note with some diffidence The Zoroastrian exordium, *Ba nām e Izad, Bakhshāinda, Bakhshāishgar, Mehrbān* corresponds so closely with *Bismillāh ir Rahmān ir Rahīm* that one can be taken to be an exact rendering of the other. A Parsi scholar has contended that the Zoroastrian equivalent goes back at least to the third century of the Christian era, and against the possibility of it being only a later translation of Arabic into Persian has put forth the argument that the Qurān had been accepted by the Persian converts in its original Arabic and any translation of its contents into Persian had been taboo for a thousand years Besides, he says, it would be illogical to assume that those Zoroastrians who had resisted Islam and had maintained the validity of their own ancient religion should have adopted for their own scriptures a formula so patent to Islam.

While this question of which is an adaptation of the other presents a problem for deeper and more extensive research, a liberal universalism will find the Islamic formula, *Bismillāh ir Rahmān ir Raḥīm,* no less sublime even if there is a possibility of its form having been adapted from a Zoroastrian model. In fact it would become even more significant as recognizing the basic validity not only of the Jews and the Christians but of Zoroastrianism as well.

Does not one find the following verse in the Qurān?

> "Lo! those who believe (in that which is revealed to thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabeans—whoever believeth in Allāh and the Last Day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve"
>
> (Pickthall's translation, II : 62)

The point to be noticed in all this is the catholicity of the Qurān. It denies the authenticity of no religion. On the contrary, it recognizes that its own basic truths—the Supremity of THE ONE and the brotherhood of mankind—are the bases of all religions. What it condemns, and condemns severely, are the accretions, the dilutions of these basic principles, the deviations from this simple discipline. On the basis of these first two fundamental truths its teaching incorporates all the religions known to the Arabs into a universal creed for all men to follow.

If the Qurān accepted the basic monotheism of Judaism and Christianity, what prevented it from recognizing such a principle in the sublime references to THE ONE recorded so frequently in the more distant religions such as that of Vedic India for example? Do not the following two among innumerable such instances, reflect the message of the Qurān itself?

"The wise call THE ONE by many names"
(Rig Veda 1 164 . 46)

"Not of HIM is there any master in the World
Nor Ruler, and verily, of HIM there is no sign.
He is the Cause, the Creator of all physical lords,
And of HIM there is neither progenitor nor lord.
(Swetasvataropanishad, vi : 9

One of several similar inscriptions in the Temple at the Banaras Hindu University. Also in Sacred Books of the East, Vol XV part II, p. 263).

But we must remember that the acceptance of even the word *Raḥmān* had been objected to by the Arabs To quote the Qurān itself, *Qālu wa mā ar Rahmān.* They say, 'And who is this Rahmān?' (XXV : 60). Would they then have accepted the names of THE ONE used by more distant religions? The hymns and prayers of Vedic India were beyond their ken. Would they have reconciled themselves, for example, to *Bhagwan* or *Ishwar*—the names used for THE ONE in the Hindu scriptures?

Evidently not: but would it be apostasy for a Muslim of the twentieth century to ask whether it would be heresy to think of the formula, *Bismillāh ir Raḥmān ir Raḥīm* as covering the concept of *Bhagwan* in addition to those of *Rahīm* and *Rahmān*?

One last question. Does not the history of the past thirteen hundred years point out that, while violence and conquests by kings and generals in the name of Islam have left only legacies of dormant antagonisms among the conquered peoples, and while the blind acceptance demanded by extreme orthodoxy has tended to repel the intellectuals among all peoples, it is this pacific and logical recognition of the essence of truth in all religions, apparently so characteristic of the interpretation of the Qurān by the Sufis and other Muslim saints, that has brought millions of Africa and Europe and Asia to the fold of Islam and contributed so much to the peace and goodwill among mankind?

These are questions for people who think—*li qaumin yatafakkarūn*—to keep closely in mind. And, verily this scriptural diadem, *In the name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm,* is an indispensable prelude when reading any and every passage of the Qurān



MOUNT HIRA

AL-QURĀN

XCVI — *Sura . 'Alaq* — Q 1.

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1	CALL, in the name of thy Lord,	
	who created!	*khalaqa**
2.	Created human-kind	
	from mutual attachment,	*'alaqin*
3.	Call, for thy Lord	
	is most Bountiful!	*akramo*
4	Who taught by the Pen;	*qalamé*
5.	Taught man what he would not	
	have known!	*ya'lamo*

(Verses 6 to 19, See Notes)

* Line endings in original

The first five lines of this Sura constitute what may be regarded as the Investiture of Mohammad as the Messenger of God to humanity. They are his first revelation and the spirit of these brief lines lends a tone to the whole of the Qurān. Almost every word in these five lines is important in guiding us further and, therefore, needs careful analysis.

The imperative verb, *Iqra'* with which the first line begins is closely allied to the English word 'Cry' and here has the meaning of 'Crying out' as through beat of drum; Call, Declare, Announce, Proclaim, Teach, Preach, all these meanings come within the purview of this one word.

This injunction to 'cry aloud' is also found in the Old Testament, dating back to the Prophet Isaiah, about thirteen hundred years earlier:

> "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."
>
> (Isaiah, lvii : 1)

For years has Mohammad been thinking; his poignant, overpowering desire to change for the good the ways of his people, is being suppressed by his innately modest nature. In what capacity is he to initiate change and reform? In what role can he make them see how they are misusing the gifts of God to their own hurt?

Ever present in his mind are the stories of the old Prophets among the Arabs, the Jews and the Christians. These men had, one after another, pulled out their followers from the morass of iniquity and callousness in which they had repeatedly fallen. Could he aspire to be in the same category as they? Is the role of a Prophet the only role in

which he can be effective? Are these constant inner promptings of Divine origin?

Tradition presents this intense, psychological drama in its usually crude and medieval style:

An angel appears to Mohammad and says, "Read!" "What shall I read?" he asks. Three times the angel repeats his commands and three times the bewildered human repeats his question. Then the angel, no doubt exasperated, squeezes poor Mohammad and lo! the spring of Qurānic verse begins to flow!

But, underneath this narrative folk-art, like rustic figures drawn on village walls, lies the magnificent saga of enlightenment Mohammad's modesty and truthfulness are being met with an urge to assume leadership, to preach the spiritual truths which have become manifest to him through forty years of his thoughtful life. This inner conflict finally resolves itself into a decision so incisive as to be impressed upon his heart as a command from the Divine itself!

Significantly enough, this word *Iqra'* is closely allied to the word *Qurān* The first is an imperative verb, the second a common noun. The word *Qurān,* which may or may not have been in common use at the time, means 'that which has been or is to be 'cried out'. It is, in a sense, a verbal declaration, an announcement, a proclamation, a sermon to be spread by word of mouth.

In that sense, the imperative, *Iqra'* embodies, in an intensely crystallized form, both a policy and a programme. His people are illiterate, scattered. The written word which has served as the scriptures of more advanced peoples, cannot reach the poor masses of the town, the slaves so much in need of solace and compassion, the bedouins hidden in the

caves and oases of the desert All these can be reached only through the spoken word.

The new guide to conduct therefore, has to be in a form that can be carried far even orally. The words themselves have to have wings What God has taught to the few among men through the power of the pen, has now to be spread, according to His injunctions, to the many among the masses through only the spoken word.

These 'announcements', therefore, must have tendrils that will cling to memory; to be effective, they must strike a chord of sympathy in every heart they reach The magic of sounds, the resonance of words, the artistry of similes, the lure of verbal associations imbedded deeply in the social mind, all these must be utilized fully to evoke a response of their innermost beings

This has probably been the genesis of all ancient religions —the Psalms of David, the Gathas of Zoroaster, the Mantras of the Rig Veda Only the nature of the people among whom Mohammad had to spread his message, made his task more difficult They were more primitive, influenced more by rugged prose than by softly flowing verse. In spite of the subject matter being quite different from the poetry of love and war and plunder, the new message had to be couched in the language and idiom of the people among whom it had to spread. It had to reflect the scorching sun and the withering winds of the desert. All these considerations finally crystallized in what must be one of the most comprehensive words of human speech. *IQRA'*

The very second word in the first line is *bismé* Now this word *ism* is used in three senses in the Arabic language. It means (a) attribute, (b) name, and (c) bidding or injunction So, preceded by the word *Iqra'* and followed by the

word *'Rabbeka'* this phrase means, Announce the attributes of thy Lord, Call in the name of thy Lord, Call at the bidding of thy Lord. Over and over again we shall meet words like this that cover several meanings which harmonize and lend to that word a comprehensiveness of meaning which is impossible to render by any equally short expression of any other language.

The third word of the first line is *Rabbeka,* 'thy Lord'. Now *Rabb* literally means 'Master' and is more or less an antonym for *'abd,* meaning 'slave'. Arab society of the time is slave-ridden and this very first announcement disparages the 'masters' of this world by pointing to the real Master who has created both master and slave. Besides, the word *Rabb* implies certain characteristics of the master. It implies a master who 'rears lovingly', 'one who moulds a child with a parent's care'. This word occurs more frequently and almost to the exclusion of the word 'Allah' in the chronologically earlier part of the Qurān when slaves constitute the base of Mohammad's small pyramid of followers.

Then the last word, *khalaqa,* 'who created'. Combined with the preceding word *Rabbeka,* it makes the Divinity all in all, the 'loving Master, Creator, through love, of all creation'.

Verse 2. We can now go on to the second line where we meet the word *Insān* While the first line referred to all creation, this second line refers specially to the creation of man; the force of the first line, however, lingers and makes this creation also a process of loving care.

The word used for man is *Insān* and the word for the means of his creation is *'Alaq* Both these words are deserving of much more attention than is generally given to them.

Insān is one who possesses *Uns* and *Uns* means love, attachment, fellow-feeling, sympathy. So *Insān* is that creature which possesses these attributes. In other words it is these qualities that are the distinguishing features of man, qualities not possessed by other creatures. And how was man made to acquire these qualities? How were they instilled into him? The Qurān says, through *'Alaq*.

Unfortunately tradition has accepted the meaning of the word *'Alaq* here to be the same as in Sura XXIII.14, where, describing the development of the embryo, the word may justifiably mean 'a clot of blood'. But here that meaning is not justified because *Insān* is not the only creature that has been evolved from a 'clot of blood'. All *Haiwān*, warm-blooded animals, would come under that category. But not all these would possess *Uns*, that is love, sympathy, fellow-feeling. Here, therefore, the word *'Alaq* must import something which contributes to the acquisition of these human characteristics—a means by which a *Haiwān* is transformed into an *Insān*

And Abul Fazl, in his *Gharib ul Qurān*, gives the *Sihah* the *Tāj* and the *Qāmūs* as lexicographical authorities to establish the meaning of the word *'Alaq* here being 'association', 'contact', 'attachment', 'attraction', 'affection', 'love'.

Any person who has even an indirect familiarity with Arabic can at once perceive the close relation between the word *'Alaq* and the word *Ta'alluq*, which is commonly used in Persian and Urdu to mean association and contact, the roots of both being palpably the same.

So this second verse means, 'Moulded humans through association'. And this is a sociological fact which, by now, has become axiomatic as is well depicted in the following somewhat crude story:

The Arabic and Sanskrit scholars of a liberal king's court vexed him by contending that their respective language was the natural language of man. Being a king, he ordered a new-born infant to be brought up among mutes. When this victim of a royal experiment reached the age of childhood, he could only utter meaningless sounds which were unintelligible even to his associates!

All social psychology is based on this concept of development through interaction and association. Human beings acquire the human characteristics only through association with human society.

Mirza Abul Fazl, gave to this Verse even a wider meaning: Humans, according to this Verse, he explained, were made *'from love'* and *'for love'*

Verse 3 Notice the persuasive repetition of the word *Iqra'* as if there is still some hesitation on the part of the person addressed. "Preach! (Do not be afraid) For thy loving Master is bountiful".

Mohammad is evidently assailed by misgiving. How far can the verbal message of a lone man carry? And the Inner Voice, speaking to his heart, reassures him. "The spread of the verbal teaching, the Qurān, through the written word, will follow through Divine grace. You just propagate the message through word of mouth. Have not the verbal messages of former times been subsequently recorded and inherited through the pen?"

Verses 4 and 5 Notice the glorification of the Pen or the written word It is through the accumulated knowledge of past generations treasured in writing that human society evolves. In the very first Call this debt to the Pen as a

recorder of the past and as a transmitter of knowledge has been acknowledged. Man becomes man, says this first Call, not only through association with his contemporary humans but by learning from the experiences of earlier generations imbedded in the records which they have left behind. It is through the instrumentality of the Pen that he learns what he would not have otherwise known.

Beginning with this chronologically first Sura and throughout the Qurān one comes across this insistence on taking the past as a lesson for the guidance of individual and collective conduct. With equal constancy the Qurān eulogizes learning and thinking on the part of the reader*

Before going further let us take a cursory look at the rhyme endings of these five lines:

a, in, o, ē, o

Throughout the Qurān the endings of the verses lend to the text a rhythm and urge which makes the Qurānic text distinguishable from any other.

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*Dr M Ajmal Khan of Delhi, an ardent proponent of an *exactly* chronological presentation of the Qurān, contends that these five lines provide answers to the two most important questions facing philosophy that of *Being* and that of *Knowing*. How do we come to *be*? HE created us How do we come to *know*? HE has provided us the means for acquiring knowledge The philosophers may continue to quibble, but these, says Ajmal Khan, are the simple answers provided by the Qurān to the basic problems of Ontology and Epistomology in the very first revelations vouchsafed to Mohammad They are, in fact, a prelude to all that follows and hence also the justification for beginning the study of the Qurān with these five verses

Verses 6-19

The rest of the Sura after Verse 5, has apparently no connection with the first Call. Why this passage was attached as a second *Rukū'*, to this pre-eminent Call, while all the other Suras of this earliest period consist of one *Rukū'* only, is a mystery at least to this student.

The whole passage is given below in the words of Pickthall's rendering.

"6. Nay, but verily man is rebellious
7. That he thinketh himself independent!
8. Lo! unto thy Lord is the return.
9. Hast thou seen him who dissuadeth
10 A slave when he prayeth?
11. Hast thou seen if he (relieth) on the guidance (of Allah)
12. Or enjoineth piety?
13. Hast thou seen if he denieth (Allah's guidance) and is froward?
14. Is he then unaware that Allah seeth?
15 Nay, but if he cease not. We will sieze him by the forelock—
16 The lying, sinful forelock—
17. Then let him call upon his henchmen!
18. We will call the guards of hell.
19. Nay! Obey not thou him. But prostrate thyself, and draw near (to Allah)."

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1.	Verily,	
	We sent it down	
	on the Glorious Night!	*qadrē*
2.	And what	
	will make thee know	
	what	
	the Glorious Night is? !	*qadrē*
3.	The Glorious Night	
	is the benediction of	
	a thousand months.	*shahrin*
4	Therein do angels	
	and revelations	
	waft down	
	by the grace of their Lord:	
	In every way	*amrin*
5.	'Tis full of peace	
	until . . .	
	the rising of . . .	
	the . . . Dawn!	*fajrē*

This is one of the Suras often recited in the daily prayers. Many Muslim children are made to learn it by heart and to recite it on occasions even if they do not, as in most non-Arab lands, understand a single word of the original

Tradition, with its characteristic tendency to limit and narrow down the meaning, has interpreted the 'night' mentioned in it, to refer specifically to one of the last ten nights of the month of *Ramadān* which now revolves round the seasons. It is generally accepted that the essence of the Qurān was revealed to Mohammad on this night.

The devotion which the Sura enjoys among Muslims is perhaps due to the fact that for us it commemorates briefly the birth of Islām which we have come to regard as specifically *our* inheritance.

It is strange, however, that the beauty and majesty of Enlightenment, which the Sura presents in such a charmingly veiled and rhetorical form, has only been vaguely discerned and rarely emphasized.

This Sura, in fact, embodies in its few lines a saga of spiritual enlightenment whether it be that of Moses or Jesus, Buddha or Mohammad. The story in each case is the same in essence. It is only coloured differently with the different tints of local understanding.

Moses goes to Mount Sinai burdened with the problems of his people. For forty days and forty nights he is all by himself (Exodus xxiv. 18). Then God, manifested in all Nature around him, begins to 'speak' to him

Jesus is led into the wilderness; for forty days and forty nights he struggles against the spirit of evil appearing in the form of Satan and comes out victorious (Matthew, iv: 1—11).

Both these experiences are described by their respective disciples in the Old and the New Testaments.

A more elaborate description of the same phenomenon, as experienced by Gautama Buddha, is contained in the charming poem of Edwin Arnold called *Light of Asia.* Here one reads long passages describing

"the lonely searchings and the strife for light. ."

and, finally, one comes across the description of the moment of illumination which comes with such serenity

"that far and near, in homes of men,
there spreads an unknown peace. "

It is only after reading these long and rhythmic passages that one begins to appreciate the brevity, the modesty and the comprehensiveness of this Qurānic Sura.

Mohammad too has been spending days and nights in the cave on Mount Hira. He has now passed his youth and early manhood; he is now forty and fully mature. He has travelled on commercial enterprizes over fifteen years.

It is the month of *Ramaḍān* which then corresponded, year after year, with the hottest season. Wakefully, in the magic nights under the starry heavens, he contemplates on the destiny of man and of the beloved city spread out before him He too struggles against human weakness—doubt and inertia, fear and misgiving—until illumination comes to him: it is this spiritual experience that is described in this Sura.

All other descriptions of such experiences, vouchsafed to Supermen, are the devoted tributes of perspicuous followers who have understood in varying degrees the Divine illuminations of their Masters and have, with the ample leisure available to the scholarly, transcribed them with thoughtful precision. How Moses or Jesus or Buddha

themselves described these experiences to their disciples, we shall never know.

But here, in this Sura, there is something first hand The words of this Sura, like those of the rest of the Qurān, from whatever source they may have come to *him*, have come to us originally from the lips of the Prophet. That is something which neither tradition nor higher criticism can deny. And therein lies the extraordinary charm and uniqueness of this narration.

In the very first verse the Divine itself is the first person.

"Verily it is We that revealed it on a glorious night."

And from the very second line it appears as if the Prophet is addressing his followers in the first person. Strangely enough, one is struck with no glaring incongruity. It seems that the Sufis are right when they say that the highest stage of spiritual attainment is that in which the human identity is lost in the Divine, the finite is absorbed in the Infinite. There is no longer any difference between Thou and I. Expressions emanating from this state of bliss are not subject to the ordinary rules of prosody.

What an Euclidean impossibility is expressed in the second Verse:

"Oh, what can make *you* comprehend how blessed the night of illumination is? !"

Yes, how is it possible for others, ordinary men and women, bound by their plodding, reasoning minds, involved in the little problems of their small egos, how is it possible for them to comprehend that which the illuminated consciousness of the deserving alone can experience at the zenith of their enlightenment?

What more than a vague, vague idea can be conveyed through words and analogies however apt these may be?

David sang: "For a day in thy court is better than a thousand. . . . (Ps. lxxxiv: 10).

And here we read: "The blessēd night is the benediction of a thousand months; the Powers (working through time and space) bring inspiration by His grace. . . . . There is peace . . . and peace . . . until . . . there breaks . . . the . . . D A W N ! ! !

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Rahīm

1.	When the land shall be convulsed to its uttermost core,	*zilzālahā*
2.	And the country shall rid itself of the burdens that suppress her	*a<u>th</u>qālahā*
3.	When men shall say: 'What has come to her?'	*mālahā*
4.	Then shall she tell out her tales	*akhbārahā*
5.	For thy Lord will inspire her !	*auḥālahā*
6.	Then shall men come forth in droves to be shown their deeds:	*a'mālahum*
7.	Whoso has done an atom's weight of good, shall see it,	
8.	And whoso has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it.	*yara'hu*

Before we discuss the simple subject matter of this Sura a note on the chronological arrangement followed here is suggested by the break in the traditional sequence.

The preceding two Suras occupied the ninety-sixth and ninety-seventh places in the traditional sequence. We began with the ninety-sixth Sura because its first five verses are conceded by almost everybody to be the first revelation of Mohammad. We followed it by the ninety-seventh Sura because that also is admitted to belong to the very early period Since the principle adopted in this arrangement is *to maintain the existing proximity of the Suras as far as is consistent with an approximately chronological arrangement,* the ninety-seventh Sura would have been followed by the ninety-eighth if, by unanimous opinion, it had not been shown to belong to the Medinan period.

So we skip Sura XCVIII and take up the sequence again from this Sura XCIX right up to Sura CXIV which constitutes the last Sura of the Qurān according to the traditional arrangement.

All these 15 Suras are small ones having less than 12 lines in each and Muir classifies 9 out of these 15 among those 18 Suras which he thinks "may have been composed before Mohammad had conceived the idea of a Divine mission or of a revelation communicated to him direct from heaven." "None of them," he says, "are in the form of a message from the Deity."

(The following are the numbers of the 18, Suras thus classified by Muir. 1, 82; 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95; 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106; 108)

And yet almost all those who have tried to work out a chronological sequence, including Muir, have thought

themselves justified in not keeping to the existing sequence even *within* this group. Since little justification can be found for interchanging the position of the Suras within such groups the personal preferences of individuals cannot be given weight. The only virtue claimed for the principle adopted here in aiming at an approximately chronological presentation is that it calls a halt to rearrangements of the Suras based on insufficient objective evidence.

While the skeletal meaning of the Sura can be found in the English rendering given here or elsewhere, its literary merits and beauty of expression can only be perceived in the original. Those who can read it in Arabic will be charmed with its alliteration, its assonance and the repetitive quality of the last two lines. Others will only be able to get a vague idea from the rhymes shown in the margin.

Al-Zalzala the name given to this Sura, and based upon the outstanding word in its first line, means 'convulsion', 'upheaval', 'earthquake', 'catastrophe', any sudden and unexpected calamity. The Sura itself is just a neatly phrased warning that the people of Mecca will soon meet with the Judgement of God, that the evil consequences of their idolatorous life are about to descend upon them. The existing social order will soon be submerged in an upheaval and give place to a more righteous regime.

Paraphrased in more general terms than is permissible in a translation, it would mean something like this:

> When the land is shaken and fear grips the hearts of men;
> When those great ones who are a burden on the people are thrown out;
> And men say : What has happened ?

On that day, history will turn over a new leaf
And each shall meet with his just deserts.

Keeping its chronological place in mind, it is evident that the Sura presages some social upheaval in the near future. But, having been recorded in the Qurān after the upheaval brought about by the teaching of Islām itself, and being put in the last part of that Book when compiled, this and several other similar warnings soon began to be understood as referring *only* to some distant Judgement Day after death It is this post-Mohammad misplacement of emphasis that is chiefly responsible for the exclusively other-worldly interpretation of this part of the Qurān

The effect of listening to and learning by heart this Sura on the few Muslims that were beginning to cluster around the new Teacher can be hardly imagined. The small Sura may well have appeared to them like a tiny cloud on the distant horizon promising to quench their thirst for a brighter existence. And what effect did it have on the arrogant vested interests that burdened the land? Did it promise for them a storm also? Did it make them uncomfortable? Did they try to suppress its recital? The answers are available in the Suras that follow and only a chronological analysis, even if it cannot be on any but a tentative, approximate basis, can show the gradual development of the situation and provide a context for understanding the meaning.

The last two lines of the Sura contain its moral in a more concentrated form. No human deed passes by without leaving its mark on the tablet of existence. An ounce of good has its reward as certainly as an ounce of evil leads to punishment. Only during an upheaval brought about by

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1.	See the blowing, puffing chargers	*dabhan*
2.	Whose striking hoofs throw sparks;	*qadhan*
3.	The scouts that scour at dawn,	*subhan*
4.	Those that raise a sudden storm of dust	*naq'an*
5.	And cleave through hosts of men!	*jam'an*
6.	Verily! Man is ungrateful to his Lord	*kanūdun*
7.	And, verily, he is thereof himself witness	*shahīdun*
8.	And, verily, in the love of his own weal he is unscrupulous.	*shadīdun*
9.	Does he not know that what is (even) buried in the tombs will be laid bare;	*qubūrē*
10	What is (even) in the breasts of men shall become known?	*sudūrē*
11.	Verily, then shall their Lord be fully informed of what they did.	*khabīrun*

The forceful alliteration of the first five lines can only be appreciated in the original Arabic. But the rhyming shown in the margin will give at least a faint idea of the poetic form of the Sura The changing assonance of the rhymes is also to be noted: *kanūd, shahīd, shadīd; qubūr, sudūr, khabīr.*

All these poetic values are entirely lost when the Sura is rendered in another language. The more faithful the translation the more it becomes a parody and the more one tries to abide by the literal meanings of the words the further he drifts from the spirit of the passage

According to this particular chronological arrangement, this happens to be the first Sura which begins with *'Wa'*, an epithet generally rendered into English as 'By' and rendered here as 'See' and elsewhere as 'Consider' or 'Witness'. Since this 'swearing by' is likely to be met with frequently in the Suras that follow, the literary significance of the word may perhaps better be explained by an example from a Jewish writer of modern times.

> "By the torture prolonged from age to age,
> By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
> By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
> By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
> By the branding tool, by the bloody whip,
> And the summons to Christian fellowship . "

This quotation (from *A Book of Jewish Thoughts* by J. H. Hertz, published in New York recently) is not altogether a good example; while it serves excellently to illustrate the use of 'By' as equivalent to the oft-found *'Wa'* of the Qurān, it also embodies a bitterness and sarcasm entirely alien to the Muslim scripture. It has been given

here merely because no other example has been met with to explain more explicitly the use of a mode of expression rarely met with and, therefore, obscure and somewhat repugnant to the average reader in English.

To the Arabs of the time, however, not only this *'Wa'* but every word and every line must have had a distinct meaning. But we cannot understand this calling of horses as witnesses until we at least try to picture in our minds the cultural patterns of the times.

Ethnology is full of patterns of nomads riding in hordes to the destruction of settled peoples And even today such predatory raids are not uncommon in desert lands. In the time of the Prophet the sight of horsemen in small groups engaging in surprise raids on their near and distant neighbours must have been a frequent occurrence.

It was almost a normal pattern of desert life. But Mohammad's sensitive mind perceives the basic wrongness of the pattern. His desert-born fondness for the horse, combining with his love of man, gives rise to feelings of pity—and inspiration moulds this exquisitely worded Sura

The name of this brief Sura of 11 lines, *Al-'Ādiyāt,* is translated as the *Assaulters* by Muhammad Ali and as *Chargers* by Mirza Abul Fazl. It consists of three parts, the opening, the body and the conclusion—each in a different rhyme. Each of the first five lines is a word picture: the swift horses, the sparks flashing from their hoofs while it is still dark, the scouts silhouetted against the brightening horizon, the dust that suddenly rises behind the swooping

raiders and finally the abrupt entry among bewildered habitations.

Then comes the thought: How ungrateful is man! These beautiful animals, this pearly dawn. How little does man appreciate what God has given him. Is he not ingratitude personified? Oh, how absorbed he is in the weal of his little self!

Thought then takes on a wider range. Does not man see the wrongness of this predatoriness? Does he not see that such a mode of life is harmful to his species in the long run?

The Sura, in short, is a beautiful example of verbal imagery and picturesque language eminently effective in bringing into relief the ingratitude of man in misusing the gifts of God.

But orthodoxy, in understanding or in translating the Sura, refuses to look beyond the literal meanings of its words and thus gets enmeshed in the very first word, '*Wa*', which is generally accepted as a form of oath All the beauty and grandeur and moral value of the word-pictures are thus lost because they become meaningless oath-words; whole passages are omitted from Selections of the Qurān because they are considered to be mere effusions of impassioned language Sensitive scholars, to whom any form of 'swearing' is unseemly, blush at the indiscretions of the Almighty no matter with what love and sympathy they may have taken up the Qurān to study as one of the sacred books of mankind.

It is interesting to note the following rendering of the first five lines by Pickthall:

> "1. By the snorting coursers
> 2 Striking sparks of fire,
> 3. And scouring to the raid at dawn,
> 4. Then therewith, with their trail of dust,
> 5 Cleaving, as one, the centre (of the foe)..."

But inspite of achieving so excellent a translation, Pickthall, who had Egyptian Muslim scholars to elucidate the Qurān for him, has the following emphatic note:

> "The meaning of the first five verses is by no means clear The above is a probable rendering."

Here is a striking example of how a clear passage, even when translated correctly, remains obscure and unintelligible when one cannot, or will not, see its background of time and place.

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1.	The Terrible Calamity !	*qāri'ah*
2	What terrible calamity !	*qāri'ah*
3.	And what will make thee know, how terrible the calamity will be ?	*qāri'ah*
4.	The day when men (in their distress) shall be like scattered moths,	*mabthuthē*
5.	And the leaders— shall be like carded wool	*manfūshē*
6	Then, as to him whose righteousness will preponderate,	*mawāzīnahū*
7.	He shall be in life well-pleasing;	*rādiyatin*
8.	And as to him whose righteousness is light,	*mawāzīnahū*
9	He will sink to perdition.	*hāwiah*
10.	And what shall make thee know what that is ?	*mā hiyah*
11	An agonizing fire !	*ḥāmiyah*

Al-Qāri'ah, used also as the title of this Sura, is the central word which sets the rhyme as well as the rhythm, and it is around this word that the whole Sura is built up. Verse 3 suggests that this was an unusual word the meaning of which was not clear to the Arabs themselves. It was either borrowed from some milieu other than the Quraish or was newly coined to express some tornado-like calamity through its onomatopoetic value and tonal associations with some other words.

The word is, therefore, difficult to translate into English and is rendered differently by different translators as follows:

Sale	The Striking
Rodwell	The Blow
Palmer	The Smiting
Muhammad Ali	The Repelling Calamity
Ghulam Sarwar	The Rattling
Pickthall	The Calamity
Arberry	The Clatterer

Mirza Abul Fazl, ever ready to better his own effort, changes from 'The Striking' in his 1910 edition to 'The Decision' in his 1916 edition and finally to 'The Terrible Calamity' in his 1955 edition.

With so much divergence of opinion among distinguished Arabic scholars, the layman is left to get a feeling for the word from a combination of all these renderings and he may also notice the resemblance of this word *qāri'ah* (inspite of a slight difference in root words) to the words *iqra'* and *qur'ān* which have already been dealt with in the notes to Q. 1.

So *Qāri'ah,* whatever else it might signify, is associated with loudness, or loud noise which is generally the outcome of some clash such as the thunder in the clouds, the uproar of rushing waters, the blasts accompanying earthquakes. Metaphorically speaking it might even suggest a clash of ideas which a new 'cry' or 'call' can bring about in a stagnant society.

Medieval orthodoxy, reading this Sura at the end of the Qurān, and after the foretold upheaval in the socio-political life of Mecca had already taken place, has naturally taken this Sura to be descriptive only of the Doomsday which, always, is still to come.

While this aspect need not be entirely ignored, the basic purpose underlying this Sura, as that of most Suras of this period, is to prepare the ground for an upheaval by making the down-trodden look forward in their own life-time to some events which were likely to free them from the yoke of slavery and exploitation. It is also intended to inculcate a grain of fear in the minds of the privileged classes, the high and mighty of the Meccan society

Wherry, in his footnotes to Sale's translation, appreciatively gives the following translation by Savary·

> "Day of calamities ! Terrible day ! Who is able to depict it unto thee ? In that day men shall be like unto scattered locusts."

But this sowing of revolutionary seed, through the medium of resonant words, does not have a political objective. It is not designed for the usurpation of power by one party from another. Its ultimate aim is a moral revolution. The idea to be instilled in the minds of the people is that a reign of the good, and the just is about to be ushered in—a 'kingdom of God', a social order based on

moral values, a human organization in which goodness will be amply rewarded and evil will be inevitably punished.

With what speed the word *Al-Qāri'ah* must have spread among the small band of adherents! With what sparkling eyes this Sura must have been whispered by one to another!

What quivers it must have caused in the hearts of those who did *not* want a change in the existing circumstances!

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	The pride of abundance beguiles you	*takāthur*
2.	Until ye reach the graves.	*maqābir*
3.	Ay! in the end shall ye know!	*ta'lamūn*
4.	Again, Ay! In the end shall ye know!	*ta'lamūn*
5.	Ay! would that ye knew with the knowledge of certainty	*yaqīn*
6.	Ye would see the flaming fire!	*jaḥīm*
7.	But ye would rather see it with the eyes of certainty!	*yaqīn*
8.	Then shall ye be asked about the pleasures (ye enjoyed).	*na'īm*

The title of the Sura, defining its theme in general, has been rendered differently by different persons. The Desire for Increase, The Pride of Abundance, The Multiplication of Wealth, Unmeaning Rivalry, and Worldly Gain, all these variations go to show that the moral purport of this brief Sura of eight lines is essentially to inculcate a realization of the futility of abundance and the end of avarice.

Mirza Abul Fazl, in his small pamphlet, *Islam and Buddhism,* equates the truth contained in this Sura with the second 'Noble Truth' of Buddhism: "The desire for existence is the origin of suffering."

A free rendering of the Sura would be somewhat as follows:

Covetousness beguiles you till Death comes,
Only then will ye realize how futile
the amassing of wealth was.
O, if you could only realize through inference,
You could have foreseen the hell of regrets!
But you will go your way
until you actually experience that hell!
Then you will ask yourselves
what real pleasure abundance provided you!

Evidently, the annunciation of a truth is not effective unless the truth is presented effectively; and if this has to be done through word symbols, the selection and arrangement of those symbols also need both effort and inspiration. In other words, to know *what* to say is easier than to understand *how* to say it. The more you ponder on the original Arabic words of this brief Sura the more you

realize the magic of its sounds, the effectiveness of its swaying rhythm and changing rhyme.

Those who have access to the original will notice, for example the peak-like ā sounds in the first two lines; this gives way to the intermediate ū in the second and third lines. In the fourth line this ū mingles with ī and this soft sighing sound accompanies the regret expressed in the words till the end.

The whole Sura has a form as distinct as a sonnet; only, it is less stereotyped. Even today and even to one who is by birth an alien to the Arabic language, it is as enchanting as music, as fresh as a transient desert bloom.

Unfortunately, it is this very musicality of the Qurān (which helped its effectiveness when it was originally recited) that tended to veil its intrinsic message in later years. To listen to the sonorous reading of this Sura by a good *Qāri* is to bring tears to our eyes. But those tears are the tears of an almost sensuous pleasure born out of the mingling of a delicious present with a nostalgic past. They are not the tears of self-realization. The beautiful melody, without intellectual meaning for most of us tends to moral numbness rather than to moral awakening. None the less, to hear the Qurān recited well even now is a feast for the soul, such are its words, its construction, its cadence.

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1. TIME itself is witness! — *'aṣr*
2. Verily, man labours in vain: — *khusrin*
3. Except those who have Faith
   and who strive righteously,
   who set examples of Truth
   and are models of
   righteous Perseverence — *sabr*

This is one of the shortest and also one of the earliest of Qurānic Suras. In fact, Muir places it first even among the eighteen Suras which, he suggests, may have been composed before the call to Prophethood. There is no mention of Allah, no warning from a Prophet; it is a simple observation resulting from a review of human experience throughout the ages.

Because *'aṣr* also means 'afternoon', and the word has subsequently been associated particularly with the afternoon prayer, Muslim orthodoxy and Western scholarship have both accepted this phrase *wal 'aṣr*, to be merely an oath on the afternoon prayers. This cannot be because this Sura was proclaimed long before any prayers had been enjoined.

On the other hand, no one can deny that the word *'aṣr* also, and more frequently, means just 'time', and taking an oath on 'time' can mean nothing less than submitting TIME itself as witness!

In that sense, the brief expression, *wal 'aṣr* covers innumerable volumes of written and unwritten history. The whole of man's experience is laid bare as proof of the assertion which follows—Verily, man labours in vain! It reminds one of the first Noble Truth of Buddhism. 'Existence is suffering!'

This brief compound word, *wal 'asr*, embodying both the oath and the object on which the oath is taken, asks the one addressed to look back into man's history. How many generations, one after another, have been born and have disappeared like the leaves of the forest. What have the vast majority of individuals in these generations achieved?

Have they not just eaten and mated and died like locusts? Have their labours not been in vain?

The moment one realizes the truth of this statement, there comes the reaction—Surely, not *all* could have laboured in vain! Surely, the labours of some at least have *not* been in vain! And, lo! the very next line of the Sura brings the answer:

"Except those who have Faith!"

But here again the meaning which the word *āmanū*, came to acquire later, distracts our attention from its wider significance and confines it to the limits of a particular belief. The Muslims tend to limit its meaning to themselves as 'those who are in the faith'! Again, however, it has to be pointed out, and here lies the value of a chronological analysis, that this Sura was announced at a time when there was practically none, or at least very few, 'in the faith'.

'Those who have faith', therefore, has to be understood in a wider sense, in the sense of having faith in the law of God, whether it be on the physical or on the moral plane. Only those who can be said to have faith, who believe implicitly that it is as futile to do the slightest wrong and yet escape punishment as it is to hope that the force of gravitation will fail to operate when one takes a false step.

'Those who have faith', in other words, are those who have implicit belief in both the existence of a Deity and in the all-permeability of an inescapable Law. For it is only such implicit belief that helps to keep them on the straight and onward path of righteousness and prevents them from straying inevitably into paths which make their labours vain.

This is the first but not the only qualification of the exceptions amongst men whose labours have not been, or

are not to be, in vain, for the Sura goes on to say almost in the same breath:

"And who strive righteously . ."

Yes, "Faith without works, is dead" (James ii:26) It is not enough to believe in the all-pervasiveness of the Law of God. One has to justify one's existence by righteous endeavour, for life impels activity; and if that activity is not to lead astray, if it is not to lead to frustration and bankruptcy, if even those who have faith are not to flounder, then their vital energy has to be directed in harmony with the Law in which they have implicit faith.

But this brief Sura is not content with faith and righteous action. It imposes two other conditions for preventing man's labours being fruitless:

"Those who set examples of Truth
And are models of steadfast perseverance."

Evidently, falsehood and discouragement face man throughout life. In order that he might not fall amidst the vast generality of those whose labours have been futile, he has to hold on to Truth and continue to Persevere until the end of his earthly existence For the word *tawāsau* means not only to be a temporary example to others but to live as an example to be left behind as a legacy. Only those whose whole life has been an example of Faith, Righteousness, Truth and Perseverance, only they, this Sura contends, are exceptions to the rule that Man, in general, is a loser; Man's labours, generally, are in vain.

As a proof of this condensed expression having such wide implications, the Sura calls on all human experience as witness. All past and all present, it says, bear out the truth

of this assertion. And if we do look on the infinitesimally little that each one of us knows of history, we cannot help seeing the truth which this Sura embodies. For Time is more impartial than we assume it to be. The impartiality of history, as some one has said, is not that of a mirror which merely reflects objects but of the judge who sees, listens and decides. And history, indeed, corroborates the Qurānic dictum presented in this brief Sura.

Reviewing human experience, a philosopher may well exclaim, "All, all is vanity!"

But the Qurān says, "No! Not *all.* Look back and see: The labours of *some* have *not* been in vain..."

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Woe to every slanderer (and) backbiter!	*lumazatin*
2.	Who hoardeth up wealth and prepares it (for contingencies)!	*'addadahu*
3.	He thinks that his wealth will make him ever-secure	*akhladahu*
4.	Ay! he shall surely be flung into bitter agony.	*hutamatin*
5.	And what shall make thee know how bitter the agony will be?	*hutamatu*
6.	The fire of God kindled,	*muq'adatu*
7.	Which mounts above the hearts (of men)!	*af'idatē*
8.	Verily, it shall envelop them like a vault	*mu'sadatun*
9.	On outstretched columns!	*mumaddatin*

It is difficult for me to grasp the essence of this Sura in which Slander and Hoarding are denounced together as if one was an inevitable accompaniment of the other.

Perhaps the words used for the two evils were associated in the social milieu of the time. Perhaps the meanings of the two Arabic words, translated as 'slander' and 'hoarding', are not, or possibly, were not, as distinct as their equivalent English words are A last possibility is that a particular person having a combination of these two characteristics is under fire and his two characteristics have been condemned in general terms instead of condemning him.

It is undoubtedly an early Sura. But Muir's inclusion of it among the Suras which, according to him, might have been composed even before the Call to Prophethood, is untenable because this is evidently a rejoinder to the slander and opposition which Mohammad had already begun to encounter. It does not contain a universal observation like the one in the preceding Sura. On the contrary its fiery spirit is more akin to denunciations like the one we came across in the later passage associated with Sura *'Alaq* (Q. 1; XCVI).

We have seen in the preceding Suras (Q. 3, 4, 5 and 6), how vested interests were being undermined through the burning eloquence of the new Message. Naturally, these vested interests too were initiating a campaign of slander and backbiting supported by the wealth of some individuals who were financing the opposition. It was on the strength of such wealth that Mohammad's message had so far been treated with derision and laughter. But, evidently, that stage was soon passing and the battle between exploitation and liberation was becoming hot.

One word, *al-ḥutamah,* in Verses 4 and 5, is of particular interest owing to it being defined as if its meaning was either not commonly understood or because a certain phase of its meaning was intended to be emphasized. Sale retains the original Arabic word in his English translation. A Turkish translator renders it as the Bottomless Pit. Mirza Abul Fazl had rendered it as Blasting Fire even in his first (1910) edition. Muhammad Ali renders it as Crushing Disaster. N. J. Dawood translates it as Destroying Flame. But the point to be particularly noticed is that in all cases *huṭama,* what ever it might be, rises 'in' or 'above' or 'upto' *the hearts* of men!

Muhammad Ali adds in the foot-note: "A man's hell is thus within his own heart in this life and it will assume a more palpable shape in the life to come."

So the Qurān, using the language of the desert, is evidently appealing to the hearts of men, warning them that their own consciences will consume them if they continue to revile and spread slander which they know to be false and undeserved. Their wealth, it says, will not avail them against their own consciences; it will only be as fuel to the fire in which they will burn

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In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1. Hast thou not seen
   what thy Lord did
   with those who came
   with the elephant? — *fīl*
2. Did He not make their plans
   end in humiliation? — *taḍlīl*
3. He sent upon them swarms
   (of evil)
   one upon another, — *abābīl*
4. Crushing them (as if)
   with pelted stones, — *sijjīl*
5. And leaving them
   like grazēd,
   stubbled fields. — *ma'kūl*

This rendering of the Sura will be found somewhat different from the usual translation but careful study will perhaps justify it. It is true that by giving to the words, *ṭairan abābīl*, the popular interpretation it becomes a sort of nursery rhyme for grown-up children but it is in fact a gem amongst the gems of Qurānic verse which, when read in the original and understood as here translated, provides a treat to the heart and a lesson to the mind.

Unlike the preceding Sura, this one has drawn a great deal of comment from both friends and critics of the Qurān. The figurative mention of 'birds' 'dropping stones', has given a rare chance to the imagination of medieval commentators and pages and pages have been written to describe the events —one commentator expanding upon the achievements of the other. And some Western scholars have, in this expanding mythology, found ample scope to draw smiles from their sceptical readers.

The story to which this Sura points out as a moral, is well known and given in the notes of almost all translations of the Qurān. The year 570 A C. in which, incidentally, Mohammad was born, was known as the 'Year of the Elephant'. And when this Sura was revealed some of the Meccans who had been alive at the time were still living. Being familiar with the idiom no one challenged the description.

Abraha, a Viceroy of the Christian king of Ethiopia, had resented the prosperity of Mecca. In order to draw the pilgrim crowds to his own city in the Yemen he had brought an army, headed by an elephant, to frighten the pagan Arabs and to destroy their sanctuary, the *Ka'ba* This army had been miraculously destroyed by some natural

calamity. Some say it was pestilence and disease, others attribute it to a shower of meteorites. Naturally, therefore, legend had grown around the incident during the past forty years.

Perhaps, similar stories, as found in the Bible had helped in building up a sacerdotal halo of mystery and awe around the legend:

> "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses"
>
> (II Kings, xix: 35 and Isaiah, xxxvii: 36)

Anyway, that was a story well-known to old and young of the time and the Qurān narrates it, with an amazing economy of words and magic of expression, not with the purpose of telling the story, (for that was already well known) but with the sole object of conveying through it a simple moral *God himself punishes those who persecute!*

Without mentioning Mohammad's mission, without referring to the persecution which his adherents were beginning to meet at the hands of his fellow citizens, this Sura, in effect, says:

> Don't you remember how God punished the unjustified
> aggression against your own religion?
> Don't you realize that if you
> try to destroy the new religion,
> God will punish you likewise?

And to the small group of his adherents, beginning to meet in secret, the same words served not as rhetorical questions, but as an angelic message of reassurance. Yes, God

will punish these aggressors too and will save their own little persecuted band from the tortures that were beginning to be inflicted upon them. These exploiters of theirs! Yes, they too will, one day, present a field trampled upon by feeding cattle!

All this is conveyed through five brief lines. No wonder the Arabs, to whom brevity of speech and elegance of words were the highest merits in an individual, regarded this as magic or its origin as Divine. And what do *we* call such distilled inspiration if not Divine?

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1.	For the uniting of the Quraish,	*quraishin*
2.	—Their uniting for	
	the caravans of Winter and Summer—	*saif*
3.	Let them serve the Lord of this House	*bait*
4.	Who feeds them against hunger	
	and keeps them safe	
	from fear!	*khauf*

The Arabic line-endings given in the margin suggest an absence of form and symmetry in this brief Sura. But the structure and cadence of the Arabic text are as perfect as in all other smaller Suras.

The variation in the understanding of the first word *l'ilāf* has clouded the essential meaning of these four lines and has given rise to some ambiguity Taking the more generally accepted meaning as given here one's first impression is that some link between the first and second portions is probably taken for granted·

"For the uniting of the Quraish ..
Let them serve the Lord of this House...

Should they serve Him in gratitude for having united them in the past and the present? In other words, should their service to Him be one of mere gratitude and thanksgiving? Or, should they serve Him in their own interests, that is, in order to maintain the unity of the Quraish in the future?

In fact it is in the combination of the two meanings that the significance of the passage lies· if they recognized the beneficence of the Lord of this House in uniting them, they would continue to serve Him and thus maintain this unity which contributes to their well-being and safety.

The geographical location of the city of Mecca in a waterless valley is a unique example in a world in which towns are generally located in the proximity of water. The Quraish are deprived of this great natural advantage and yet the existence of the Ka'ba, the House originally erected for the worship of the One God, and the annual routine of the two caravans of summer and winter, combined with

the intervening gatherings of the pilgrims, not only brought prosperity to the Quraish but also gave them the security which few other valleys enjoyed. These four brief lines, therefore, remind them of these blessings and urge them to serve the Lord of the House, both in recognition of the blessings which they have been enjoying and in order to continue to be deserving of them in the future.

The Ka'ba at this time was the seat of many deities The call to serve THE LORD of this HOUSE would thus appear to be incongruous. But therein, precisely, lies the charm of this indirect suggestion to recognize the ONE and ignore the others.

The affirmation of the ONE is explicit while the negation of the others is implicit. *La ilāha il ALLAH*—'No deity is there except THE DEITY' is here expressed between the lines and without the use of words. And further the fact that they are advised to serve the Lord of this House, implies that they are neither realizing their debt nor fulfilling their obligations to Him. This indirect approach and veiled hint is the real essence of the Sura. It is possible that it was revealed on the occasion of some ceremony or function connected with the Ka'ba

Evidently the Qurān is as impersonal in praise as it is in apportioning blame. Here is a clear instance in which Mohammad's own clan, the Quraish, is being offered a bouquet, but no individuals are mentioned. And within the bouquet is hidden a hint of admonition. It is this indirect method of influencing thought and behaviour that is the outstanding characteristic of the Qurānic message.

The original words *rihlatash shitā'i was saif* refer to the two Caravans of Winter and Summer which are said to have been regularized by a forefather of the Quraish The acceptance of this meaning—and no one has yet offered an alternative—commits one to accept also the fact that the Calendar observed by the Arabs was not independent of the sun and the seasons governed by it. If they regularly organized trade caravans going North in summer and South in winter, then the *Hajj* could *never* have also occurred in these seasons as it often does now. The two annual festivals for which people gathered in Mecca from all quarters could not but have coincided with the two intervening equinoctial periods of March-April and September-October. One of these occasions was called the *Hajj-i-Asghar* and the other the *Hajj-i-Akbar* But more of this elsewhere

(See Q 25, LXXXIX)

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1.	Do you (not) see	
	who it is	
	that really spurns the reckoning?	*dīn*
2.	It is he	
	who turns away the orphan	*yatīma*
3.	And stirs not to feed the poor!	*miskīn*
4.	Woe to those	
	who (thus salute	
	as if prepared to) serve;	*muṣallīn*
5.	But of their (real) service	
	are neglectful	*sāhūn*
6.	Woe to those	
	who make a show	
	(of rendering service)	*yurā'ūn*
7.	And yet	
	(to those who need it)	
	deny help!	*mā'ūn*

This also is one of the Suras often recited in the daily prayers It is an outstanding gem among the gems of Qurānic verse from the viewpoints of both meaning and construction. It sheds light on two of the most important words of the Qurān, *dīn* and *salāt*.

The first of these two words, *dīn*, occurs frequently throughout the Qurān but all translators have interpreted it as 'reckoning' or 'judgement' in some places and in the sense of 'religion', 'creed' or 'faith' when translating it in other passages.

For example, in the third Verse of the famous Sura *Fātiḥah* (Sura I), the phrase, *yaum id dīn*, is invariably translated as 'the day of reckoning'. On the other hand, in the oft-quoted Verse 3 of Sura *Māi'da* (Sura V), the words, *akmaltu lakum dīnukum*, are with equal unanimity, translated as, 'perfected for you your religion'.

There is, in fact, justification for this variation because even the word 'reckoning' in the English language has two allied meanings. It can be used as a verb and as a noun. As a verb, 'reckoning' means 'to judge', 'to calculate', 'to reckon'; as a noun, 'reckoning' stands for 'the answer', 'the formula', 'the truth' arrived at according to a process of reasoning or logic

The word *dīn*, likewise, means both 'a process of reckoning' and 'an outcome of reckoning' which can constitute a religion or a creed. The decision as to which of these two meanings is to be applied to the word *dīn* in different places will, therefore, have to depend upon whether this or that meaning fits better into the particular context.

Likewise, the word *salāt*, conveys more than one meaning. First and foremost it means 'duty', 'moral obligation',

'responsibility'. And, because some kind of worship has always been regarded as the 'duty' of man in all religions, the same word, *salāt* was in use to connote the ritual of worship as practised by the pagan Arabs.

In fact the word 'service', in English, with its dual meaning of 'church service' and 'service to man or God', would be the exact equivalent of the word *salāt* in Arabic. Its phonetic resemblance to the English word 'salute' is also startling, perhaps, like *sirāt* and 'street', they have a common origin.

Even Mohammad's new teaching, retained the same word, *salāt*, for the new form of worship and merely altered the form, the content and the objective. Instead of *salāt* being offered to idols, and consisting of the clapping of hands and other such clamour, he made his followers bow in salute to the unseen, Omnipresent, Universal Allah; it only became a more disciplined collective performance resembling partly pagan and partly Christian worship.

But this was only a ritual, a means of providing firm roots to the new eclectic religion, a parade before the One for whom alone it was to command those who had mobilized themselves in His service. But the spirit of the new teaching, like that of true Christianity, was to be permeated with the desire for service to man. Righteous endeavour to help the needy was emphasized as the real *ṣalāt*

It is only in the light of this variety of meanings to the words *dīn* and *salāt* that the delicate nuances of these words become discernible in the Sura.

The implication of the rhetorical question in the first line, therefore, comes to be that the detractors of Mohammad are bringing a double charge against him:

First, that of abandoning the *creed* (*dīn*) of their fathers,

Second, that of disregarding the consequences, the reckoning (*dīn*) which must, as they see it, mean disaster to their community.

The Qurān turns the tables against these detractors by asking barbed questions:

> "Do you not see who is making a travesty of the creed (*dīn*) of the community?

or "Do you not see who it is that is disregarding the inevitability of reckoning (*dīn*)?

and it goes on itself to answer:

> "It is those who have no sympathy for their fellow-creatures, those who push away and care not even for these who are orphans and, therefore, helpless. . .
>
> "It is they who make a show of serving God by ritual salute and advertised charity while they deny even ordinary courtesy to their poor neighbours . .

It will be remembered that the Bible has a somewhat similar passage:

> "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites . . . and use not vain repetitions."
>
> (Matth vi, 5-7)

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1. Verily, We have granted you in abundance | *kauthar*
2. Then keep on serving
   for the sake of thy Lord
   and learn to forego ! | *anḥar*
3. It is they,
   they that taunt you
   that shall be in want ! | *abtar*

This briefest of all *Qurānic* Suras is regarded by many as the finest example of *Qurānic* comprehensiveness, construction and language. It is even said that Arab poets, gathered for a pre-Islamic *hajj*, had acclaimed it as surpassing all the odes that had been composed for the poetic contest.

All the three lines end in the same rhyme, *kauthar anhar, abtar*. Each of these three words, however, has led to conjectures and differences of interpretation.

The first of these, *kauthar*, all scholars agree, means plenty, abundance, ample good, inexhaustible blessings, brimming good life But since such unmitigated blessings are difficult to picture in one's mind, and most of us humans must have some image as an object of thought, this abstract idea of abundance was transformed in the minds of desert Arabs into a river flowing with cool milk and honey. Since, again, this was inconceivable on earth, it was transferred to heaven! And, of course, only the faithful would have access to it.

The second word, *anhar*, the most important of the three, is the imperative from *nahara*, the literal meaning of which is 'to sacrifice' as most commentators understand and render it But, like the meaning of the word 'service' the meaning of this word 'sacrifice' too has been tragically mutilated, in perhaps all languages, by time and the human capacity to evade. The moral significance of the word 'sacrifice', and one preferred still by the righteous among all religions, is 'to forego one's own needs and pleasures in favour of the needs and pleasures of others'. To sacrifice to God, therefore, is to forego the satisfaction of one's own needs and comforts in the service of God To sacrifice

one's self or one's life is to devote all one's energy, time and possessions, and life itself if need be, in the pursuit of a cause.

But this is what the Qurān calls 'the steep and difficult path' which man generally evades in one way or another. The priesthood of all religions and at all times simplify this hard task for their clients and (incidentally, no doubt) for their own advantage. Millions of Muslims every year escape the injunction to sacrifice their own needs and comforts for the sake of the community by conveniently transferring the responsibility on dumb animals who are made to pay with their lives for the omissions and commissions of those who agree to accommodate each other at the cost of a goat or a sheep, a cow or a camel!

The last of the three words, *abtar,* stands essentially for 'unfortunate', 'miserable', 'deprived'. But this again is too vague and abstract an idea. The common mind needs an image of misfortune. And among pagans, especially, to have no male heirs is considered the highest misfortune and deprivation.

Now even if we did not otherwise know that Mohammad had begun to be subjected to persecution of different sorts at this stage of his mission, these brief lines themselves indicate what he was facing.

He was now between forty and forty five years of age. He had been married to a prosperous widow for fifteen or twenty years and yet had no male heir. Failing to ridicule his message, his opponents began to make personal attacks. They laughed at him, taunted him. His few staunch adherents who had no personal patrons besides Mohammad, were molested, often by masters who owned them as slaves. On all sides there was discouragement.

It is under these circumstances that the Divine Inner Voice consoles him:

> 'Do not be discouraged! You might yourself be deprived according to prevailing standards; but We have granted you an abundance of Our blessings . . .
>
> 'Continue to serve and learn to forego such pleasures and comforts as are incompatible with your mission . . .
>
> 'It is those who taunt you that are unfortunate, it is they who will be miserable, the disinherited . . .'

What comfort and courage must this Inner Voice have brought to him! What comfort and courage these three lines can still bring to those who are discouraged and yet aspire to follow the path of righteous endeavour!!

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Say O ye of little faith!	*kāfirūn*
2.	I serve not what ye serve;	*ta'budūn*
3.	And ye serve not what I serve.	*a'budu*
4.	Nor will I serve what ye serve	*'abadtum*
5.	Nor will ye serve what I serve:	*a'budu*
6.	For you is your reckoning, for me, mine!	*dīn*

This and three other Suras commence with the word *'Qul'*, which means 'Say', a word which is understood to be an injunction of God, or the Inner Voice, to Mohammad himself. But it is interesting to note that the word, *'Qul'*, especially as it is used here and repeated many times in the Qurān, has a wider applicability. It can, in turn, represent an injunction of the Prophet to his followers, each of whom, in reciting the Verses in question, not only repeats the statement he is asked to make but also, by saying *'Qul'*, enjoins upon others, in their turn, to repeat it.

The essence of this Sura, for example, is a command to make the position of the new teaching clear to its opponents and then to accept a parting of ways cordially:

"Qul . . . lakum dīnukum wa liya dīn"
Say . . . to you is your reckoning, for me mine.

The necessity of not being satisfied with faith and good works but of also enjoining truth and steadfastness on others (Q. 7) is here shown in practice. One has not only to adopt this attitude of *Lakum dīnukum wa liya dīn*, towards others, but one is to persuade other Muslims to adopt it.

The word *kāfirūn*, most translators render as "Unbelievers'. That is perhaps not incorrect. But we have got so used to this English equivalent of the word *kāfirūn* that it never occurs to us that the translation might not be quite correct either.

It must be remembered that throughout the Qurān this word, *kāfirūn*, is used as an antonym for *mu'minīn*, and *mu'minīn*, as discussed under Sura *'Asr* (Q. 7), are the Men of Faith. *Kāfirūn*, therefore, are those in whom there is no faith (Deuteronomy, xxxii: 20) and *yā ayyohal kāfirūn* becomes identical with 'O ye of little faith' (Luke xii: 28).

The reason why the word *kāfirūn* seems so much stronger than 'those of little faith' is because of the almost abusive associations which the word *kāfir* has acquired during *subsequent* Islāmic history. That could not have been the case in these early times. For if the word *kāfir* at that time was as strong a term as it is today addressing those he wants to cordially placate, as *kāfirūn* would be highly tactless. Besides, it would be a strange beginning for a Sura which was to end so amicably!

Each of the next four lines contains one or more forms of the root *'abada* meaning 'to serve'. Now the word *'ibādat,* (derived from *'abada*) in this Sura, and the word *salāt* in the preceding two Suras, are so inextricably linked in Islām as almost to be synonymous. Both words are used for 'worship', both for 'duties', both for 'prayers', both for 'service'. The first, *'ibādat* perhaps means all these things in a more general sense, while the latter, *salāt,* in a more specific sense In most cases they are interchangeable.

The essential purpose of this Sura, therefore, appears to be to announce the recognition of the fundamental difference of approach between decadent paganism and renascent Islām as to the meanings of *'ibādat* and *salāt,* i.e , prayers, duties, service and worship; in short, religion as conceived by the one and the other.

Paganism regarded religion to consist of conforming rigidly to the ritualistic and static way of life inherited from the hoary past. Islām emphasized a re-appraisal of values, a reconstruction of thought, a revision of the ritual so as to make all these more in keeping with the stage of social evolution reached at the time, more in harmony with the existing needs of the community.

The meaning of the word *'abada,* 'to serve', as taught

by Mohammad, was diametrically opposite to the meanings which this word had for the pagan Arabs. And this Sura forces the recognition of the difference between *'ibūdat* as understood by the two in the same manner as Sura *Mā'ūn* (Q 11) distinguishes between *salāt* as understood by one from that as understood by the other.

The terse and facile last line of the Sura, coming after the alliterative and repetitious contents of the intervening four lines, presents a finalé which is remarkable for both its strength and its eloquence

"For you is your reckoning; for me, mine"

What a formula for co-existence! How peaceably all arguments would end if this, distilled essence of the 'Live and let live' attitude formed the finalé of all unsettled disputes.

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1. When there comes the aid of God,
   and the gates fly open, — *fathu*
2. You will see men
   entering the Faith in throngs: — *afwājan*
   Strive on at the bidding of thy Lord,
3. Therefore,
   and show them grace,
   Verily, He is the great Forbearer! — *tawwāban*

Except William Muir all translators and commentators have assigned this Sura to the last period of Mohammad's mission Most of them have, in fact, seen in it a reference to the conquest of Mecca and even a warning of the Prophet's approaching demise.

It is evidently the occurrence of certain words, associated with the Suras of the later period, that has given rise to this widespread opinion The most notable among these words are the endings of the three Verses *fathu, afwājan* and *tawwāban* The first two, suggesting conquest and armies respectively, are associated in our minds with the Medinan period of Mohammad's mission. Even the word, *nasr*, is found more frequently in the later Suras; and, apart from its occurrence in this Sura, the word *tawwāb* is to be found only in the Suras of the last period All this is in support of the prevailing argument in favour of assigning the Sura to the later Medinan period.

On the other hand, arguments in favour of retaining it among the small Suras of the early period are not lacking, although they have so far been entirely overlooked.

Acceptance of the prevailing belief would imply that this small Sura of three lines was promulgated not when small Suras were the rule, in the earliest period of the Mission, but at a later time when longer Suras were the mode. To see this delicate miniature, thrust between the larger canvasses of later Qurānic verse, as in the chronological translations of Rodwell, Abul Fazl and now Dawood, is to witness an incongruity which needs more cogent reasons to justify.

Second, some of the words of this Sura are not as uncommon in the chronologically early Suras as may be

assumed at first sight. The word *naṣr* is found in other forms in LXXXVI: 10 and in LIV: 10, 44. The word *fatḥa* is also found in LXXVIII: 19 and LIV: 8. Even the word *fauj* is found in LXXVIII: 18 as well as in LVII: 8. *Sabbih* is the very first word in Sura LXXXVII. And all these are admitted to be early Suras by all concerned.

Third, the word *fatha* does not always mean armed conquest. Bell translates this word here as 'the clearing up' and notes below the text that "the word is used in the sense of something which will clear up a doubtful situation". He gives Verse XXXII: 28 as an example. In his Introduction to the Sura, he accepts it as "certainly Medinan" but is inclined to regard it as referring to Badr, "if it refers to any definite event."

All this detailed analysis has been called for because in this case the stand taken here is against all others (except Muir) who have had anything to say regarding the chronological placement of this Sura. And because this stand is based on objective data only, this data had to be clarified.

The principle followed here, viz, *to break sequence as little as possible,* may also have biased my judgement and persuaded me to find reasons for keeping it among its neighbours; but I cannot help seeing in this Sura a replica of feelings and thoughts which are characteristic of the early small Suras only. Compare, for example Verse 3 here with Verse 2 in Sura *Kauthar* (Q 12, CVIII).

Assuming then that this too is an early Sura one can see in it the following background: Mohammad is a little discouraged with the slow growth of his little community and the Inner Voice soothes him:

God's help will come;
the doubts and misgivings
that hold them back
will be cleared away;
then people will enter your
Faith in throngs;
Meanwhile, strive on,
forbear with them;
do you not see
how much your Lord forbears?

That, in short, is the spirit of the Sura. And in this sense it appears to be much richer in moral content than in the form and spirit in which it is generally translated and understood—as a revelation *following* success.

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Damned be his handiwork, and damned be he, this fire-spitting Father of Flames!	*tabb*
2.	Neither what he has acquired nor what he is engaged in	*kasab*
3.	Will save him from himself burning in the fiery flames!	*lahab*
4.	And his wife also: on her shoulders a bundle of faggots,	*ḥatab*
5.	And around her neck, a string of tinder !	*masad*

Religion is generally so long-faced and serious a phenomenon that the incisive, and, like all things Arabian, fiery humour inherent in this Sura has gone entirely unobserved by all commentators.

It is to be noted that this is a rare instance in which a contemporary has been mentioned by name, but it must be remembered that Abu Lahab is not a name; it is only an appellation acquired by a man on the basis of his fiery temperament Although commentators assume that it was a well-known nick-name of one of Mohammad's own uncles who opposed him bitterly, one can dismiss that as an example of the ever-present tendency of giving a personal touch to a general observation That assumption need not, therefore, be necessarily true. All that we can say is that there was a particularly nasty couple—the husband engaged in fire-spitting and the wife an obnoxious vilifier and scandal-monger, in the habit of kindling the fire of discord wherever she went

This couple was evidently maligning Mohammad's new teaching; and words, spoken fiercely behind one's back, or whispered in the privacy of homes, can both cause more obstruction to a movement than violent but open opposition. How then could their effect be counteracted except through words that would serve as antidotes to calumny?

Ridicule is a subtly potent weapon and this Sura is an excellent example of how effectively that weapon can be used. The caricature drawn of the couple, through words and rhymes chosen with such delicate precision, is so droll and farcical that both husband and wife must have suddenly begun to appear as buffoons losing all their effectiveness

and sting. All that they said and did thenceforth must have reminded people of this Sura!

Neither his dubiously acquired name, 'Father of Flames', nor his occupation of 'fire-spitting', is to save him from going to his own element, the fiery flames!

And these fiery flames in which both are to burn, may be, ironically enough, a fire kindled by the wife herself who is ever ready for social arson, carrying a bundle of scandal, like faggots, on her shoulder, and a string of insinuating lies, like a rope of lighted fibre, around her neck!

Imagine how the reciting of this Sura must have deflated the sails of the couple in question. What hilarious laughter it must have evoked among the young Arabs ever ready to enjoy a joke especially if it also had literary merit. How the stock of this couple must have gone down even among those who were not unfriendly to this bumptious and blustering fire-eater!

With what relish the little band of Mohammad's adherents must have recited this picturesque invective.

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Say. He is Allāh, the One!	*aḥad*
2	Allah, the Eternal	
	Refuge of all!	*samad*
3.	He begets not,	
	nor is He begotten!	*yūlad*
4.	And like unto Him	
	there can be no other!	*ahad*

This is the Sura second in importance and popularity in the daily prayers only to the Sura *Fātiha* with which the traditional recension of the Qurān begins.

It has been called, perhaps subsequently, *Ikhlās* which is equivalent to *khālis*, meaning 'the pure and brief doctrine', 'the essence of faith', 'the epitome of the Muslim creed'.

The difficulty or rather the impossibility of rendering adequately in English, the Qurānic message, may be illustrated in this Sura by the different meanings which different translators have given to the word *samad* which occurs only once in the Qurān. The following are the different renderings.

1.	1649 Ross	God is eternall
2.	1736 Sale	the eternal God
3	1861 Rodwell	God the eternal
4.	1880 Palmer	„ „ „
5.	1910 Abul Fazl	„ „ „
6	1916 Muhammad Ali	Allah is He on whom all depend
7.	1926 G. Sarwar	God unique
8.	1930 Yusuf Ali	God the Eternal, Absolute
9.	1930 Iqbāl	God the mateless (*Reconstruction*)
10.	1930 Pickthall	Allah, the eternally besought of all
11.	1937 Bell	Allāh the Eternal
12.	1955 Arberry	God the everlasting Refuge
13.	1956 Dawood	the Eternal God

It will be noticed that the most popular rendering is "the eternal" and yet difference in choice is not lacking Besides, no satisfactory derivative explanation has been

given for confirming its meaning as 'eternal'. Arab commentators take the word as meaning 'the one to whom recourse is had', 'the chief'. The Semitic root *ṣamada* means 'to bind together'; in this context that would suggest the rendering to be 'the undivided'.

This is merely an example. A number of words present the same kind of difficulty.

Another aspect deserving of notice here is the importance this Sura assumes when it is given its chronological priority. How commonplace it would be if it had been revealed in the later Medinan period, for example. But when, through a chronological arrangement of the Suras, the realization is forced on the casual reader that it was announced at a time when Mohammad was beset on all sides by those who worshipped a hegemony of gods and goddesses, one cannot help realizing the single-mindedness and courage of the person who could make so direct a statement in the face of such violent opposition.

The doctrine embodied in the Sura is one that has always been, and will always be, a matter of interest and conjecture to philosophy and religion. Hence every student needs to clarify as far as he can his own attitude towards it.

Now all that our senses perceive and all that our imagination can conceive, points to some ONE behind the many. A UNITY behind all diversity. In the innumerable millenniums of history man has called this ONE by many names and while there have been interminable differences in defining the attributes and the nature of this ONE in its relation to the rest of what man can perceive or conceive of, man has seldom failed to realize the existence of this ONE whom words and even thought fails to describe The

philosophies and sciences and literatures of all peoples and in all times only serve to show man's failure to comprehend this ONE. Perhaps the encompassing of this Infinite Reality, by the finite mind of man is itself a geometrical contradiction.

In any case the four brief and rhymed lines of this Sura, specifically define the position of the Qurān regarding this ONE. The entire contents of this Message conforms rigidly to this definition.

But, as explained above, the recognition of the ONE is almost as old as humanity itself. Where then lay Islam's contribution to Monotheism?

It lay in the following:

First, it made this definition of the ONE the fundamental basis of all its teaching: Other creeds had realized it but had not given it this exclusive importance.

Second, it defined the ONE in such simple, brief, musical and easily remembered terms that the ONE became a part of immediate human experience instead of remaining a remote conception.

Third, it brought the idea of the ONE from the minds of the intellectual elite to the hearts of the simple masses.

In short it is the *undiluted* and *exclusive* emphasis which the Qurān placed on this ONE that is its real contribution to both metaphysics and ethics.

Some will find the following resume of Muhammad Ali's note on this Sura helpful. *Shirk*, or the setting up of equals with the ONE and ONLY, he explains, is of four kinds.

(a) a belief in the plurality of gods;
e g. polytheism, trinity etc.

(b) a belief that other things may possess the perfect attributes of the Divine Being;
e.g. pantheism.

(c) a belief that any thing or person may be related to the ONE,
e.g. Christ, son of God, angels, daughters of Allāh etc.

(d) a belief that others may do what is ascribable only to the Divine Being,
e.g. miracles of saints etc.

All these four kinds of *Shirk,* Muhammad Ali says, are rejected by the four brief lines of this Sura.

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1. Say: I take refuge
   in the Lord of the Dawn ! *falaq*
2. From the malevolent aspects
   of His creation *khalaq*
3. From the evils of the darkness
   when it encompasseth; *waqab*
4. From the mischief
   of those who cast knots
   and weaken resolutions; *'uqad*
5. From the injury
   by the envious
   when he envies. *ḥasad*

In the original, as indicated even in the line endings, the hard *'qāf'* sound, absent in English, is repeated in all but the last line, the easy flow of which is like the smooth running of a brook after it has passed over a little cataract. Note also in the original the alliteration and the repetitive beginnings of the last three lines.

This and the next constitute the last two Suras in the orthodox *'Uthmānian* recension although some are inclined to regard these two Suras as not properly belonging to the Qurān at all It is an accepted fact that Ibne Mas'ud had omitted them from his compilation of the Qurān.

Muhammad Ali, in his Note to the preceding Sura (Q. 16, CXII) says:

> "This is really the concluding chapter of the Holy Qurān—the two chapters that follow only show how protection of the Lord is to be sought . . ."

> Wherry, in his commentary on Sale's translation, says that

> ". . . these formulae were adopted by Mohammad from incantations already in popular use among the Arabs. The fear of being called a sorcerer would have forbidden Mohammad from adopting any thing grotesque at a late date in his ministry."

It is probably this ambiguity regarding the placement and functions of these Suras which has caused a great deal of legend and superstition to grow around them although, as will be seen in the above rendering, there is nothing in their contents which need be interpreted as 'prescribed incantation'—particularly against the evil doings of witches and magicians—unless, of course, the reader is predisposed to inject these meanings into the text.

It must be noted that the words, 'darkness' and 'dawn', like 'winter' and 'spring', not only represent two conspicuously contrasting phenomena of Nature, but have, in all languages, been used to express many other similarly opposite circumstances or states of mind met with in life.

In Zoroastrianism they even represent the two forces of good and evil. This holds good even in English literary usage. 'The *darkest* hour is just before the *dawn*', for example, is a quotation used often to express the hope and trust in the Merciful God who created both night and day, and who will soon replace the intensest gloom and suffering, by happiness that will resemble the most beautiful part of the daily cycle. It is the same as saying that 'every *cloud* has a *silver lining*'. Or, like asking, 'O wind, if *winter* comes, will *spring* be far behind?'

In desert lands the diurnal contrasts are even more conspicuous than elsewhere. Night there descends suddenly and the dusty haze often dims even the stars. When, after the weird and ugly gloom has lasted its destined span, the coming dawn, not only brings light but is almost a tangible thing of pearl-like beauty in contact with which all mental gloom disappears and the human soul awakes refreshed for another day of laughter or tears, leisure or toil

We know that making one's mind dwell on pleasant memories or trying to recapture a beautiful picture or a pleasing tune, tends to bring repose to a disturbed mind. So also to think of the Dawn and especially a desert dawn, is a tonic to a troubled soul when beset with the worries of this passing life.

"Say I take refuge
in the Lord of the Dawn !"

Refuge from what ?

"From the evils which some of His own creations
can inflict:
From the gloom and terrors that can envelop
the mind like utter darkness;
From the winds of circumstances
and the whisperings
and incantations
that weaken resolutions
and raise doubts;
From the envy, the spite, the jealousy
the ill-will of fellow humans
who sometimes hurt for mere spite!

And in whom can one take refuge from these creations and creatures of God, if not in God himself? And how can one take refuge in God, if not by thinking of, and making his mind dwell upon, the benevolent aspects of His creation?

In that sense, this Sura *is* a charm as well as a talisman. It is an amulet to the troubled soul.

But to simple people all over the world, charms and talismans have a more precise and crude meaning. Can we blame them for actually believing in its efficacy as a talisman and hugging it closely to their hearts when Eastern and Western scholars can both be so casual as to relegate this Sura to the realm of 'incantation'?

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Say: I take refuge in	
	The Lord of men,	*rabb in nās*
2.	The King of men,	*malik in nās*
3.	The God of men:	*ilāh in nās*
4.	From the hurt of slinking thoughts,	*khannās*
5.	That cast and leave doubts	
	in the hearts of men,	*sudūr in nās*
6.	(Whether they come) from	
	jinn or men!	*jinnate wan nās*

Note that all six lines end in the same rhyme; in fact, all lines but the fourth, end in the same word *nās,* meaning 'men'.

In the preceding Sura the first line alone mentioned the Being *in whom* refuge was being taken while the other four referred to the evils *from which* refuge was being sought. In this Sura the first three lines glorify the Being and the last three describe only one evil from which refuge was being sought.

What is this one great evil?

The nearest translation is, slinking doubts that cast and leave doubts in the hearts of men. In other words, refuge is being sought from a particular frame of mind which predisposes an individual to hurt of many sorts.

What then is this dangerous frame of mind and what its consequences? Let us examine this in some detail.

That state is the state of doubt, uncertainty, hesitation; it leads to bewilderment, fear and misgiving, it makes one perplexed, it makes one falter. One is liable to get lost, to go astray, to go adrift. It can make one distraught and distracted

> 'He who doubts', says an old Sanskrit proverb, 'perishes'.

It is this state of mind that shakes one's faith and makes one sceptical, mistrustful and disbelieving. It is this mental state that leads to apathy, indifference, laxity and thence gradually towards misconduct, crime, schizophrenia, or lunacy. In short it is a state of mind which is the exact opposite of *Faith* which strengthens the minds of men and predisposes them to both right conduct and happiness.

And how is this evil, pathological state of mind brought about?

The Sura, in effect, says: through evil thoughts, through unhealthy suggestions—whether they reach the mind from other men or from some unknown sources, within or without one's self, which is here referred to, in the colloquialism of the time, as 'jinn'.

Now the development of mental sciences, and as for that matter even the development of the physical sciences, during the past fifty years, has again given to the Mind of man a greater importance than it enjoyed in the preceding centuries. And, apart from this relative precedence, we today know much more of its working than we ever did before. Psychiatry, hypnotism, mental hygiene, psycho-analysis and a host of other words of a similar nature, have been coined only recently, and we are fast coming to realize that not only *most* evils, with which social life is beset, but *all* evils which flesh is heir to, are after all, perhaps, manifestations of the Mind and the Mind alone.

"Today", said the Queen of England, when ushering in the year 1958, "we need the kind of courage that can withstand the subtle corruption of the cynics!"

We have become aware too of the fact that both the causes and cures of mental ill-health are thoughts injected, thoughts which we now call suggestions. And these suggestions come to the mind, exactly as the Qurān says, either from other men or from some undefinable source either within or without one's self. When the latter lead to health and courage and mental happiness or to the social good, we say they are from the Inner Voice, from God. When they tend to hurt either an individual or society we say they are from satan, from jinn, any one of the many names which men have given to these evil sources in different places and at different times.

And how is each individual to deal with such thoughts that *hurt the body, affect the mind and sear the soul?* Should the Qurān have advised the Arabs of the seventh century to seek help from psychiatrists?

It recommends a far more efficatious and ever available source of help. It says, seek refuge in HIM:

"Say: I take refuge
in the Lord and Master of men,
In the King of men
In the God of men!"

And the echoes of the Gita resound:

"They who take refuge in ME, O Partha,
though of the womb of sin,
women, vaishyas, even sudras,
they also tread the highest path!"
(Gita, 9·32)

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	The (Mounts of the) Fig and the Olive	*zaitūn*
	bear witness!	
2.	The Tor of Sinai itself	*sīnīn*
	stands witness!	
3.	And witness is	*amīn*
	this City inviolate!	
4.	Verily, We fashion men	*taqwīm*
	in the finest of moulds!	
5.	Then We consigned them	*sāfilīn*
	among the coarsest of the coarse:	
6.	Except those who have Faith	*sālihātē*
	and engage in righteousness,	
7.	For them is reward,	*ṣālihātē*
	without obligation!	*mamnūn*
8.	Who then can deny Our reckoning?	*dīn*
9.	Is not Allāh the Justest	
	among the Just?	*ḥākimīn*

This Sura is an excellent example of the metaphorical language which so often puzzles the reader. When looked at superficially it can be so very misleading, and yet it can mean so much when the veil of metaphor is lifted.

The first three lines here, for example, draw attention to three different peoples—the Christians, the Jews and the pagan Arabs. The fourth line points to the pristine origin of each and the fifth their demoralization at the time when this Sura is revealed The sixth and seventh lines withdraw the exceptional individuals from each of these groups and the eighth and ninth lines present a whole philosophy of life in the form of two simple questions.

Several authorities indicate that there were two hills in the vicinity of Jerusalem respectively called *Zaita* and *Tīna* With the first, now called Mount of Olives, we are all familiar. Perhaps the other hill is still called the Mount of Figs or simply Tīna. Perhaps, it is at present in the Jewish section of the holy land. In any case the Olive and the Fig are so common in Palestine that they come to be representatives of that region. Used also as symbols in the New Testament (See Luke, xiii and xxi, Romans, xi) they are here used as symbols for the land where Christ taught, the cradle of Christianity.

The Tor of Sinai is located in the Sinai Peninsula, north-west of Mecca and is generally accepted as the place from where Moses brought down the Ten Commandments—the birth-place of Judaism.

And of course, 'this city inviolate' is plainly a reference to Mecca, the city bearing the sanctuary of the Ka'ba sanctified for the worship of the One God by Abraham.

In Sura *'Asr* (Q 7; CIII) Time itself was submitted

as witness to the working of an impartial Law of Retribution and Reward. Here the three major peoples or religious groups, familiar to the then Arabs, are put in the witness box.

Just look at all these three regions, these three peoples, says the Qurān: How glorious was their origin, how great their Teachers, the Messengers of God who gave them shape and collective individuality! But look at them today. Are they not the coarsest among the coarse?

But, characteristically, the Qurān immediately withdraws from this generalization the exceptions to the rule:

> "Except those (among these groups) who have Faith and engage in good work; for them is reward without obligation."

Such exceptions among even these miserable groups are not themselves miserable, that is what the Qurān contends.

And then it asks, Who then, can deny the incessant working of a moral Law? An automatic reckoning set in motion by God? Is not Allāh the Justest among the just?

In the Name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Have We not made thy heart to blossom?	*sadraka*
2.	And lightened for thee the load	*wizraka*
3.	Which (well nigh) bent thy back?	*zahraka*
4.	Have We not exalted for thee, thy repute?	*dhikraka*
5.	Then, verily, after adversity cometh ease,	*yusran*
6.	Verily! after adversity cometh ease!	*yusran*
7.	So now that you are free (of worries) attend to thy duties,	*ansab*
8.	And to (the service of) thy Lord, thyself devote.	*arghab*

The first line of this Sura in the original Arabic, *alam nashrah laka ṣadraka*, translated literally, amounts to a simple question: 'Have we not opened thy heart?'

Metaphorically, the meaning is quite clear:

> Have we not given thee enlightenment?
> Have we not expanded thy understanding?
> Have we not widened thy vision?
> Have we not given thee courage to face difficulties?

Any of these, or something similar, would have conveyed the meaning more or less satisfactorily. But medieval religiosity could condemn all of them as 'opinionated interpretations', what they called *tafsīr bi r rāi*; it would be satisfied with nothing but the crude literal meaning

Condensing the interpretations given to this Verse by eminent and honoured Muslim commentators of the Qurān, such as Baidhawi and Yahya, Sale has the following solemn note to his translation of this verse:

> "This passage is thought to intimate the *opening* of Muhammad's heart in his infancy or when he took his journey to heaven, by the Angel Gabriel, who, having wrung out the black drop, or seed of original sin, washed and cleansed the same, and filled it with wisdom and faith. . ."

This is how inspired words soon assume the form of myths!

Shorn of all such accretions, viewed by itself and read in the original, over and over again, what charm this Sura has!

It is the Inner Voice addressing a man in his early

forties. He has passed through a childhood of orphanage and poverty and a youth of striving, both economic and moral. Through sheer honesty and sincerity, he has acquired the title of *Amīn* Through marriage and trade he has now reached affluence. Perhaps his daughter, Fātima, has just been born to Khadīja; ease has come to him after toil, the buds of his human desires have opened into flowers.

But his consuming desire to serve his people and his God continue. His subconscious is ever busy revolving the task that still lies before him. In the still hours of the night, these words take form in his mind. From, he knows not where, the rhymes arrange themselves, the message assumes the shape of rhetorical questions and ends in a firm, unambiguous directive.

He is not able to explain, even to himself, the source of the inspiration. But it is so chaste, so elegant, so clear, so intimate, so touching! So free from the vulgarities of the *shā'ir* and the ambiguities of the *kāhin*. No, it cannot be from Satan or from the Jinns! Who can it be from except the One and true Allāh?

So it is carefully memorized, and, later, recited to the little band of followers. Immediately it strikes a chord in their hearts and is, in turn, memorized by them all.

From them it has come down to us in a miracle of undiluted form through three score and ten generations in these thirteen hundred years. What was only for a small band of Arabs of the seventh century can now stir the hearts of all mankind.

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Witness is the forenoon light!	*duhā*
2.	Witness the (preceding) gloom of night!	*sajā*
3.	Thy Lord has not forsaken thee, nor does He stint,	*qalā*
4.	Thy future shall be better than the past	*ūlā*
5.	And soon will your Lord give you all you want	*tardā*
6.	Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter thee?	*āwā*
7.	Did He not find thee in want and and guide thee?	*hadā*
8.	Did He not find thee in want and enrich thee?	*aghnā*
9.	Then, the orphan, discomfit him not!	*taqhar*
10.	And the seeker, rebuke him not!	*tanhar*
11.	And the blessings of thy Lord, recount!	*ḥaddith*

Both the chiselled form and the contents indicate that this is evidently a message very much akin to the one in the preceding Sura Since these are the only two Suras addressed specifically and personally to Mohammad, the text itself has suggested the context. It is, therefore, stated with an assurance which leaves room for doubt, that these Suras depict a period when the stream of inspiration had been suspended for a time and people had begun to say that Mohammad's Allāh had forsaken him etc. etc.

Abul Fazl is a little restrained in his appraisal of the situation This and the preceding two Suras, he says, "are all expressions of a state of deep anxiety and depression in which Mohammad is assured of God's continued protection. They belong to a time when his success was very dubious and his future career by no means clearly marked out."

What this Sura explains, perhaps more clearly than the others, is that a relation has been established between the subconscious self of Mohammad and the Great Consciousness, a relation which neither he could understand then nor can we comprehend now

It is this Great Consciousness which is urging him on, providing solace and encouragement, comparing the gloom of his past circumstances with the darkness of night, contrasting it with the brightness of the forenoon in which Mohammad now finds himself. Through such comparisons and contrasts it suggests to him that while the night is over, the brightest part of the day is still to come.

The ring thrown by Hanuman assures Sita that Rām has not forsaken her, the fresh blossoms opening in his garden assure Rabindranath that God has not yet lost faith in Man.

To Mohammad, the Source of all Inspiration itself points out to the light of the morning, following the darkness of night, as an example of effulgence following gloom.

The only difference between the first two and the last instance is that, while in the former, consolation was the only objective, the purpose of the last is to persuade the recipient of the message to more and more righteous endeavour.

It is not for nothing that the Lord of Creation brings the light of the day after the gloom of night. In this light of day one has to perform certain duties entrusted to him: One must not chide an orphan, one must not turn away from the seeker; what has been given to one, he must, through words and actions, gratefully acknowledge.

The advice is here whispered to the heart of Mohammad: it is a stage whisper for all mankind!

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1	(Even as) the darkness of night	*yaghshā*
2	(Differs from) the brightness of day;	*tajallā*
3.	The male in Creation	
	(differs from) the female·	*unthā*
4	Verily, your paths (too) are diverse!	*lashattā*
5.	He who is receptive and fears evil	*wat-taqā*
6	He who (readily) accepts what is good	*bil husnā*
7.	For him will be smoothened	
	the path to felicity!	*lil yusrā*
8	But he who holds back	
	and deemeth himself self-sufficient	*wastaghnā*
9	He who (persistently) denies the good	*bil husnā*
10.	For him will be smoothened	
	the path to adversity!	*lil'usrā*
11	Nor will his posessions avail him	
	when he downward slides.	*taraddā*
12	Verily, it is for Us	
	(in justice) to lead	*hudā*
	(this one here and that one there),	
13.	And with Us is the present	
	and the future.	*wal ūlā*
14.	I warn you then	
	of the fiery agony!	*talazzā*
15.	Wherein will enter	
	none but the incorrigibles,	*ashqā*
16.	They who (persistently) denied	
	and turned their back on the truth.	*tawallā*

17.	But stranger to it will be he who fears evil,	*al atqā*
18.	He who purifies himself by fulfilling his responsibilities.	*yatazakkā*
19.	He who gives no boon With an eye to recompense—	*tujzā*
20.	Except the good-will of his Lord, the Exalted—	*a'lā*
21.	Such men shall be content.	*yarḍā*

Following the traditional sequence in the reverse (see Chronological Table in the Introduction) we now come to slightly longer compositions, which, however, still preserve their unitary characteristics

A particular feature to note is the common rhyme in all the 21 lines of this Sura. Every one of these rhyme words ends in sounds expressed in Arabic by *yā* with *y* as silent.

The meaning of the Sura too is plain and sustained throughout. It is merely a restatement of the principle which the Qurān emphasizes over and over again and particularly in this early period. Man *cannot* escape from the working of the Moral Law; those inclined to the good *shall* prosper, those inclined to evil *shall* suffer. But every time, this basic message is presented in a fresh form adorned with words of rhythm and beauty.

Explaining Indian arts and crafts, an Indian writer says, "The more abstract the truth you wish to teach, the more must you allure the senses to it." Essentially that observation expresses a real need of human nature. But the Qurān has none of the usual means to tickle the senses, no vehicles of art to effect such allurement. It cannot make use of form or clour, line or melody. It has nothing but the words of a then-primitive desert language But this it uses with unbelievable skill to allure the soul itself.

In that sense, this is not rugged Nature, it is nearer to chiselled Art. Nor is the chiselling that of even a master-craftsman. As the product of a process in the mind of a man who claims to be neither a poet nor a scholar, it is nothing less than Inspiration from the Divine. That is why it is incomparable

But how is it possible to convey the magic effect of this inspired construction by merely translating the words

and by trying to express only the meanings of the lines. It is precisely such characteristics of the Qurãn which make it impossible to render its scintillating message adequately in any other language.

The pivotal words of the Sura are those of the fourth verse which comes as a climax to the opening trio of asseverations and explains what is meant:

> Verily, your (respective) tendencies are leading you to (widely) different destinations!

The strongly worded asseverations in the first three lines (wrongly called 'oaths', which incidentally, are defined in the English dictionary as "expletives" or "pieces of profanity") only draw attention to natural phenomena which have conspicuously opposite characteristics. The gloom of night as contrasted with the brightness of the day, the male and the female principles so noticeably permeating all that we call 'life'. To put it in prosaic language the opening passage, would, in short, mean something like this:

> As much as night differs from day, as conspicuously as males differ from females, even so clearly differ the paths of some of you from those of others....

The word, *a'tā* in *Verse 5* is generally translated as 'one who gives alms'. But the stage of teaching reached in this early period does not justify that meaning. The almost opposite meaning of the same word, viz. 'one who accepts', fits in more appropriately. 'One who is amenable to learning', 'receptive to new ideas', 'capable of being trained', that is what is meant here according to Abul Fazl in his *Gharīb ul Qurān* (1947). The other qualifications mentioned immediately afterwards, bear out this contention.

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Raḥīm

1.	Consider the Sun!	
	The light that enshrineth it;	*ḍuḥāhā*
2.	The moon that reflecteth it;	*talāhā*
3.	The morning that discloses it;	*jallāhā*
4.	The night that veileth it.	*yaghshāhā*
5.	Consider the heaven	
	and Him who adorned it;	*banāhā*
6.	Consider the earth	
	and Him who enriched it;	*ṭaḥāhā*
7.	Consider man's conscience	
	and Him who perfected it;	*sawwāhā*
8.	Endowed it with discrimination	
	between the evil and the good:	*taqwāhā*
9.	Verily, prosper shall he	
	who keeps it clean and sensitive!	*zakkāhā*
10.	And undone will be he	
	who buries it out of sight!!	*das sāhā*
11	The (tribe of) Thamoud denied	
	(their own conscience)	
	in their pride and ignorance;	*ṭaghwāhā*
12	When the basest among them	
	came forth,	*ashqāhā*
13	An Apostle of the Lord said to him,	
	This is Allah's camel, let her drink.	*suqyāhā*
14	But they ignored him	
	and allowed the helpless animal	
	to be crippled.	

	Then came upon them the doom from their Lord, the doom which levelled them all	*sawwāhā*
15.	Without regard to consequences.	*'uqbāhā*

With this Sura commences another form of composition the annunciation of a principle followed by one or more examples. But the fact that they together constitute a single pattern is borne out convincingly by the rhyme repeated throughout the fifteen verses all of which end in *āha*

The first six lines are a heraldic opening leading upto the essential lesson of the Sura. The Sun itself, ever-present in the minds of the desert peoples, is again shown as an example. The light of even that most brilliant of objects which man knew of, even that can be dulled by circumstances The moon reflects it in yellow paleness. The night hides it altogether

The next two lines expand the imagery and carry thought to the Creator behind creation,—the Power responsible for the adornment of the heavens, for the enrichment of the earth and for the inculcation of the moral judgement in Man.

Then comes the essential postulate The distinguishing characteristic of man in all Creation is his capacity of being able to choose This capacity and the chances of exercising it may be very little indeed. But it *is* there. It is in the acquisition of this sensitivity and in the continuous effort to develop the capacity to discriminate the good from the evil, it is here that the secret of success lies

He who continues to keep clean the spectacles of his conscience will have no difficulty in distinguishing good from evil But he who makes no use of his conscience, or deliberately ignores or contravenes its soft suggestions, atrophies his capacity of moral discernment. Herein, says the Qurān, lies the secret of Man's success or failure.

The example given of a former people, in Verses 11-16, however extraneous it may seem to what has gone before, is in fact, necessary to complete the lesson. For these lines point to the collective conscience of a group and suggest that the responsibility of maintaining the group conscience sensitive lies upon all individuals belonging to that group.

In the case cited, it was only one man, the basest among the Thamūd, who actually crippled a helpless creature dedicated to God. But this crime, suggests the Qurān, lay at the hands of the tribe as a whole because the individuals constituting the tribe did not act according to the dictates of their respective consciences. They did not remonstrate That is why God's punishment came upon them collectively and the Doom engulfed not only the actually guilty individual but all those of the tribe who were passive witnesses.

Here again one does not have to go into the details as to who the Thamūd were and what exactly the story of the camel is The Qurān is not narrating a story. As in Sura *Fīl* (Q 9, CV) it is merely referring to a story with which the Arabs are already familiar, and irrespective of its objective veracity. It is only using the story as a medium for conveying and illustrating a point. *Not only individuals, but groups who do not act according to the dictates of the higher judgement endowed in them by God, subject themselves to ruin and annihilation*

And, lastly, one must not overlook the indirect reference to the immediate present which is well-nigh imperceptible; it is conveyed not in words but through the absence of words, directly to the subconscious of Mohammad's audience

Only one or two, or at most a few of the Meccans, have begun to molest the voiceless, helpless followers of

Mohammad who have dedicated themselves to the service of Allāh Other Meccans are merely looking on with varying degrees of interest. Remember, says this Sura, remember: These few, the worst among you, are not the only ones who will be punished. You, all of you, who consider yourselves innocent of actual violence or even of participation in a wrong being done, you too cannot evade responsibility so easily. Your non-interference is itself an unrighteous act. So, when retribution comes, you too, like the Thamūd will suffer collectively!

It is this vital principle of educational psychology, the indirect method of influencing human behaviour, it is this virtue of the Qurān which has not been sufficiently appreciated Most commentators get enmeshed in the stories which are mere vehicles for a lesson, without stopping to ponder on the lesson which the vehicle carries Stunned with the magnificence of the *'mahmil'*, they forget that it is only behind the curtain of the *'mahmil'* that Leila reclines!

This search for Leila behind the mahmil is not, however, without its attendant dangers Many sects have grown up in Islam, each picturing Leila according to the imaginations and inclinations of its own founder and implicitly believing Leila to be there even when the mahmil was empty and without curtains!

A simple assertion, for example, that a certain passage has also an indirect bearing on some other subject is liable to being completely misunderstood. It is through this process that straightforward statements have been given esoteric meanings and the faithful of each group have gone into rapturous trances imagining these words to mean something other than what they appear to mean, to contain a meaning which they alone could understand!

But such is the weakness of the human intelligence and such the limitations of language. The path of truth is, indeed, narrow and edged. Only the very, very wary can keep themselves from falling on one side or the other

> "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth into life and few there be who find it."
>
> (Matthew: vii: 14)

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1	Nay . . . This land is itself witness	*baladē*
2	—And thou hast thyself	
	been nurtured in this land—	*baladē*
3.	Witness are	
	(the relations between)	
	the begetter and the begot:	*waladā*
4.	Verily, We created Man	
	to (feel each other's) pain ,	*kabadin*
5.	Does he count on none	
	having power over him?	*'ahadun*
6.	He boasts,	
	Wealth have I squandered galore!	*lubadan*
7.	Does he count	
	on no one having seen him?	*'ahadun*
8.	Have We not given him two eyes?	*'ainainē*
9.	And a tongue and two lips?	*shafatainē*
10.	Have We not shown him the two paths?	*najdainē*
11	Why then does Man	
	not choose the Upward Path?	*'aqabata*
12.	But O, what shall make thee see	
	what the Upward Path is ?!	*'aqabatu*
13	It is, to free one from a yoke,	*raqabatin*
14.	To help one on a day of adversity,	*masghabatin*
15.	An orphaned, distant relative	*maqrabatin*
16	Or one who is poor—	
	entirely forlorn.	*matrabatin*

17. Then to be one among those
who have Faith
and enjoin
fortitude and mercy. *marḥamatĭ*

18. These are the people on the Right Path,
the Righteous! *maimanatĭ*

19. But those who disregard Our gifts
(of perception,)
they are the losers, *mashʼamatĭ*

20. It is they
whom the Fire (of regret)
will envelop! *muʼṣadatun*

The composition of this Sura is noteworthy as an example of all the longer Suras that follow. It can easily be broken into four or five or even six portions and each can form a unit easy to memorize, a sort of canto or rhymed stanza Each is complete in meaning and yet a faint but perceptible thread of thought runs through the whole.

The basic moral ingredient of the Sura is the same as that of Sura *al-'Asr* (Q 7; CIII); and added to it are the perceptible bouquets of other Suras also. Inspite of its length it is one which can be memorized with advantage by the young in its pristine original Arabic form.

The line endings too, are a distinct feature—the last syllables, studied by themselves, present a remarkable series resembling a musical scale:

dē, dē, dā,
din, dun, dan, dun,
nainē, tainē, dainē
ta, tu,
tin, tin, tin, tin,
tē, tē, tē,
tun

Evidently, the Qurān is still an unexplored mine in which gems of music are awaiting the development of research to reveal themselves.

The opening passage of the Sura commences with *La*, meaning, 'No' and ends with the ambiguous statement which translated literally means, 'We have made man for pain, misery.' We must, however, remember that this passage takes the place of the abbreviated heraldic asseverations which we have seen in several preceding Suras. It is,

therefore, necessary to use a great deal of imagination, to read between the lines and to obtain a meaning in harmony with the spirit of the Sura as a whole.

Reverently, and not without misgiving, I submit the following alternative interpretations for the consideration of the intuitively learned:

Mohammad is deep in thought worrying his heart out for solving the maze of problems in human relations which his beloved City, Mecca, and its people present. All day, perhaps, one among many such problems, troubles him. Late into the night he ponders over how it can be solved Perhaps it haunts his subconscious even in his sleep. Then, when fully awake, or when just awake from his thought-filled slumbers, he involuntarily shakes his head,

No ! you cannot get away from the fact !
Love is the only solution
God gave to man a heart sensitive to the
pain of others.
Man's only fault is that he suppresses
this sensitivity as well as
the dictates of his conscience.

That, perhaps, is the essence of this revelation. Mohammad's own background, the language and idiom of the Arabs, the dialect of the Quraish, the need of giving examples, the rhythm and the rhymes required for expressions of this kind, all these help to mould the Sura in the shape that it finally assumes.

To elaborate this line of thought still further:

'See how a father protects his son, a son his father, however much the one or the other may be in the wrong!

See how daughters are detested. The relations that exist between the masters and the slaves!

'But do not be vexed with these people. You are born of this city. This City will have a rebirth through you. You must continue to love it You must strive to gain its love. You must make its people realize the mutual love for which God created them. No . . . there is no other way!'

A second interpretation is suggested by the alternative meaning of the word *hilla* One meaning is 'one who resides in or dwells in a place' and this is the meaning taken in the foregoing analysis. But others take this word *hilla* as an antonym for *harama*, meaning 'the sacred', 'the sacrosanct' Under this other meaning this passage would mean something like this·

'What a City is yours !

> 'Strangers and even animals are given sanctuary and are to be left unmolested. But you were born in this city, those who begot you were born here, those you beget will live here, and yet *you* are persecuted.
>
> 'Still you want to serve its people. So remember that man was made to suffer. To suffer so that he might be sensitive to others' suffering.'

Our task is to search for the spirit of the message hiding shyly behind the veils of words and metaphors, composition, rhymes and punctuation. Until we meet with a more apt interpretation we have to be content with what our little intelligence suggests.

Verse 6: The word *ahlakto* has been rendered into English by some as 'wasted' and by others as 'destroyed'.

One little-known translation of selections from the Qurān has gone to the extent of translating the line as,

> 'He crieth aloud: What sacrifices have I not made
> to help the poor and the needy !'

On the other hand, it might, with equal justification, be rendered as,

> 'He boasts: How many tribes have I looted,
> their wealth destroyed!'

So the meaning of Verses 5, 6 and 7 are not really clear to me.

Verse 9: The tongue and the two lips are evidently metonyms for the power to speak and the capacity to keep silent. To speak when required, to keep silent when necessary, these are the characteristics of the Wise; and wisdom, suggests this Sura, is a God-given talent which needs to be developed as much as the sensitivity of the conscience.

Verse 13: Most translations take this phrase *fakku raqabatin,* to have the limited meaning of freeing a slave. But Mirza Abul Fazl insisted that it has a wider meaning of freeing a person from a yoke whether that yoke be that of slavery or of some other kind. Slavery, in some instances, might not be a yoke; freedom need not necessarily mean absence of bondage.

Yusuf Ali tends to enlarge the meaning still further with his inclination to emphasize that the industrialized and modern West is itself in bondage. He translates the phrase as 'freeing the bondsman', but explains in his foot-note that slavery may be political, industrial or social; slavery of con-

ventions, ignorance and superstition; slavery of wealth or passion or power.

The point to be particularly noted is that this 'releasing from bondage' is given top priority and is placed even above that of helping people in the time of adversity. Some have pointed out that the Arabs were then hemmed in by the Persian Empire and this verse indicated that freedom from this political yoke was the greatest aim of the Prophet.

Verse 14: Here also the restricted meaning generally taken is that of feeding the poor in the days of famine. But this, in a land of perpetual scarcity, is only a way of enjoining the rendering of help in all kinds of adversity. Likewise the word *yatīm*, 'orphan', need not be restricted to the literal meaning of one who has lost his father. It must be given the general meaning of one who has no one to protect him or her against the inclemencies of human existence. So also, 'one of kin' is not, necessarily, a blood relative It must embrace all fellow-beings whom one regards as nearly or distantly related to one's self.

Verses 17-20 This passage is almost identical with Sura *al-'Asr* (Q 7; CIII) Only the word *marhama* is used in place of *haqq* in that Sura There the leaving of a legacy of truth was enjoined Here one is told that those who leave a 'legacy of mercy' or 'charity' are the righteous Both are aspects of the same, the Good and the Beautiful.

Verse 19 The word, *āyātinā* has several meanings and it is here generally translated as 'our signs'. But, in the light of what has been explained above, this word evidently

refers to the power of discernment and choice of action which has been given to Man alone as a gift from his Creator. Those who do not exercise their judgement, and instead, follow after only their physical needs like animals, or those who allow themselves to be herded like cattle, they are the ones who will suffer the pangs of regret, it is they who will wring their hands in futility, burn in the slow fire of remorse.

In the Name of Allāh, the Rahmān, the Rahīm

1.	Witness is the (festive) Dawn!	*fajrē*
2	Witness (the gambols) ten nights long!	*'ashrin*
3.	Witness the games of chance!	*watrē*
4	Witness the (last) fortuitous night!	*yasrē*
5.	Is there (not) in all these a testimony for those who ponder?	*hijrin*
6.	Hast thou not seen how thy Lord punished the 'Ād?	*'Ādin*
7.	Iram's mighty-pillared lords	*'imādē*
8.	Whose equals there were none in all the land?	*bilādē*
9.	And Thamūd whose power (o'er men) overcame the hardness of rocks to build them abodes of safety?	*bilwādē*
10.	And Pharaoh, of mighty hosts?	*awtādē*
11	All these who burdened fellow men	*bilādē*
12.	And increased misery in the land?	*fasāda*
13	Thy Lord called down upon them all the fiat of grievous chastisement	*'azābin*
14	For, verily, thy Lord, as from an observation tower, observeth all	*mirsādē*
15	When God tries man by bestowing on him honour and abundance, man only says: My Lord hath favoured me!	*akramanē*

16. And when God tries man
by limiting his subsistence
man says:
My Lord hath frowned upon me! — *ahānanē*

17. Nay! Nay! But YE consider not
the orphan — *yatīma*
18. And YE stir not in helping
the needy — *miskīnē*
19. And YE devour your inheritance
greedily, greedily. — *lamman*
20. And YE love your property exclusively. — *jamman*

21. Nay! When (the facade of) life
crumbles to dust, — *dakkan*
22. When man faceth his Lord
and the working of His laws, — *saffan*
23. When nemesis is facing him,
then will man remember;
but what good
will remembrance do him then? — *dhikrā*

24. He will say,
Would that I had forseen
and attuned my life ere this! — *lé hayātī*
25. For then
man's suffering will be such
as God alone can inflict. — *ahadun*
26. His bonds too will be those
that God alone can bind. — *ahadun*

. . . .

27.	"O Soul that art serene	*muṭma'inna*
28	Return thou to thy Lord,	
	well-pleasing and well pleased;	*marḍīyatan*
29.	Enter thou My servants	*'ibādī*
30.	Enter thou My paradise...	*jannatī*

This is one of the less understood Suras of the Qurān and translators who elsewhere insist on the simplicity of the Qurānic message, plain even to the bedouin Arab, here take refuge behind mystic symbolism etc for their not being able to see or to point out any sustained thought or message.

Verses 1 to 5 · As in most Suras, the opening passage constitutes the greatest obstacle to understanding The four 'oaths' or 'asseverations' with which the Sura begins have given rise either to lengthy attempts at explanations or frank admission of unintelligibility.

Bell, (1939), gives the following aggressive caption to these four verses

An absurd oath (?); Meccan

Regarding the second verse, "By the even and the odd", he notes:

"This is quite unintelligible even to the Moslem commentators."

He goes on actually to translate the fifth verse literally as:

"Is there in that an oath for a man of sense?"

And no Muslim has taken exception to this verdict of absurdity so aggressively embodied in Bell's translation. Nor has any one given an alternative sensible explanation of these four verses in spite of the rhetorical fifth line which clearly implies that there *is* some sense in the preceding four lines—for those who understand.

· The cause of this inability to grasp the meaning of this opening passage is that few are able to see these verses in the light of the social patterns of the pagan times. Several

of them have, indeed, mentioned "the ten nights" as referring to the nights of *Dhu'l-Ḥijjah*, but they go no further. If they were only to stop and examine what used to happen during those ten nights, and what part these ten nights played in the annual cycle of community living, the meaning would become quite clear. But this is very difficult to do because the Calendar then prevailing is now completely extinct at least among the Muslims.

Since this is an attempt at a chronological study of the *Qurān*, the explanation of how this Calendar came to be obliterated, will have to be left to Sura *Barā't* in which some verses provide an explanation Here, therefore, the veracity of the following statements will have to be taken for granted. (See also Notes to Q. 10)

The Arab Calendar was luni-solar. That is, the months were reckoned according to the moon, but every second or third year an extra lunar month called *Nasi* was incorporated into the current year, so that the months may again correspond to the seasons in which they occurred.

The exact method and formula observed for such adjustment between the month-names and the seasons, may or may not have been the same but the principle followed was identical to that observed even to this day in both Jewish and Hindu religious calendars

The New Moon of *Muharram* ushered in the New Year and synchronized with the Hindu New Year beginning with the first moon of Kartik, October-November. The preceding last month of the year, *Dhu'l-Hijjah*, corresponded with the Hindu month of Aswin The first ten nights of *Dhu'l-Hijjah* were known as the *layālin 'ashrin*, THE TEN NIGHTS, and were as conspicuous in the annual cycle as the *Das rāth*, 'ten nights' of the *Dasehra*, in India.

Because each month began with the Moon-Rise, the night preceded the day in each diurnal cycle. These ten nights and days therefore, presented a rising crescendo of revelry mingled with religious rites until the last of the ten nights, THE Night, crammed with jubilation, ended in a riotous orgy of religious frenzy ushering THE Dawn, *Al-Fajr,* in Mecca, the day of Puja in India

Gambling was a conspicuous preoccupation throughout this period of ten nights and ten days The rich played at 'odds and evens' staking their fortunes like the princes of the Mahabharata The poor were kept amused by competitions of pebble-throwing at boulders assumed to represent devils.

Hundreds and thousands of animals were sacrificed. But while flagrant generosity boasted of feeding the poor, only the strong and the wily among the latter got the advantage, often the widow and the orphan remained hungry in the midst of plenty.

One has only to see the 'Car of Juggernaut' being pulled in Puri on the occasion of the Puja even today to realize the religious fervour that can be aroused in the masses amidst the beating of drums and the chanting of priests But when there were no social restrictions to gambling, when prostitution was sacred, when there was no such thing as the police, and when the vulgar display of wealth was a laudable social pattern, one can only use one's imagination to picture for himself the pitch of iniquity in which such gatherings could have terminated

Viewed in the light of the above factual information, the first four brief lines of this Sura become pregnant with meaning. With proper accent on the alternate words of

the original Arabic they can sound almost like the beating of Puja drums, and, who knows, whether the actual words employed in the Sura are not the very words which one heard constantly in the crowds that thronged for the pagan *Ḥajj?* The fifth verse runs smoothly to ask:

"Is there not in this riotous orgy
a sign, for those who understand,
of what must inevitably follow?"

Possibly the Sura was revealed while one such *Ḥajj* was in progress. Perhaps, Mohammad heard the distant beating drums and felt the throb of the maddening crowd while from the Source of all Inspiration came to him the words and the rhymes that gradually took the form of this Sura:

wal fajrē
wa layālin 'ashrin
wash-shaf'i wal watrē
wal lailē izā yasrē
hal fi dhālika qasmun li dhi hijrin?

Literally this would be:

By the dawn!
By the ten nights!
By the even and the odd!
By the night as it passes by!
Are there (not) in all of these
signs for those who understand?

Verses 6 to 14: From Verse 6 begins a different strain. Superficially viewed this passage presents a different theme altogether, but although there are no words to say so, this passage is merely a continuation of the first

giving examples of former peoples whose licentiousness had brought their doom.

> 'Have you not seen what thy Lord did to the
> people of 'Ād?'

In Sura *Fīl* a similar question was asked. The fate of Abraha's army was there given as an example. Here again the Arabian precedents are pointed out and between the lines is plainly to be read the admonition that unless you too ponder and introduce order in this chaotic existence of yours you too will be wiped off the face of the earth.

Verses 15 to 20· The next passage widens the theme In effect it says, "You as a people attribute the good and the evil that come to you as arbitrary acts of God's favour and disfavour. As if God too was like a human master whose acts are governed by his personal likes and dislikes

What you do not realize is that both abundance and privation are trials and because of this lack of realization you fail in these trials.

When you are tried with the good things of life you accept them merely as the unconditional bounty of God. You do not put your abundance to the right use You do not show favours to the orphans among you You do not think of those of your own community who go hungry. You devour your gifts greedily as if no one else had any right to them.

When, on the other hand, God tries you with privation most of you merely accept it as God's disfavour and succumb to defeat You show no fortitude, no courage, no perseverence, no magnanimity despite privation, no Faith in the universal mercies of God which are still there for you.

Some of this, as elsewhere, is explicit, some has to be read between the lines.

Verses 21 to 26: The tone again changes With imagery created by expressive words the passage depicts the condition of the selfish when nemesis overtakes them. What regrets it will provide for those who in their good days had thought only of themselves and only of the transient fleeting moment!

Verses 27 to 30: In these last four lines the symphony of words has softened with dramatic suddenness. There are no intervening explanatory words. The fire of the preceding lines has given way to a message full of peace from God himself! One has to interpret the break to mean that a different group is now being addressed and that this represents the end of earthly life for those who, blest or unblest with God's material favours, shared what they had with others:

O Soul that art serene
Return thou to thy Lord
well-pleasing and well-pleased,
Enter thou My servants
Enter thou My paradise . . .

How rapidly, with what economy of words, with what magic of expression and with what eloquent silences, this little-understood Sura takes us onward to what we now call humanization of the individual! How much we need such moral education for the humanization of a world which is becoming more and more secular.

Incidentally, the whole of this Sura is inscribed in inlaid black and white stone around the lofty gateway of the Taj Mahal, the tomb of a Moghal Emperor's beloved consort. It was evidently selected for its last four lines. But Shah Jehan and his descendents too have passed into oblivion, while the immortal words of the Qurān linger still as warning to those that may still heed.

EPILOGUE

The 25 Suras of the earliest period that we have studied in this Introductory part contain less than 150 Verses while all the 114 Suras of the Qurān together embody more than 6,000. In other words, the text covered in this introductory volume constitutes less than three per cent of the Qurān

And yet, just as the hidden foundation of a building is quantitatively little compared to the high edifice above ground, this less-than-three-percent, of the Qurān, being the earliest portion, constitutes the basic structure on which the subsequent edifice of Islam was raised

The last statement may raise a doubt again as to whether these 25 Suras do constitute the earliest portion of Islamic teaching. To reassure ourselves therefore, let us go back to the Statement at the end of the Prologue. It will be seen that our contention is based upon the consensus of opinion consisting of both Muslim and non-Muslim authorities who have given deep thought to the subject Minor differences there may be with regard to individual Suras, such as those given here as Q. 6 and Q. 14. But, on the whole, all the seven authorities taken into account, corroborate our belief that these do constitute the chronologically earliest teaching of Islam.

It is these Suras, in other words, which enthused Khadīja, the mature Woman; 'Ali, the earnest youth; Abu Bakr, the wealthy dignitary, Zaid, the slave; and perhaps forty of fifty others drawn from different sections of the Meccan community These Suras inculcated in them

that Faith and positive attitude which made them ready to sacrifice all that they had and to withstand the suffering which their attitude was bound to bring upon them.

It would have been desirable to arrange these 25 Suras in order of chronological precedence among themselves. That might have delineated the development of the Message even more clearly. But, not having sufficient evidence, or even consensus of opinion, any such finer adjustment would involve only personal conjecture. All that we can, therefore, say is that, irrespective of which preceded which, these 25 Suras constituted the earliest teaching and even this in itself is—or, at least, should be—a fact of immense importance to every serious student of Islam.

Let us therefore, stop for a while and look back at the path which we have traversed. What are the landmarks that we saw? Were there any that we carelessly passed by and failed to take cognizance of?

1. **God : RABB**—We started with the idea of the Deity as RABB, the Master of all earthly masters and of all earthly slaves; HE who is alone deserving of servitude. HE who is the source of all creation, who made man through love and for love. He who developed man's emotional life through affection and attachment and provided for him his mental repertoire through knowledge inherited and enlarged by means of the Pen, the written word. (*'Alaq*; Q 1)

2. **God : ALLĀH**—Later we came to the same Deity emphasized as ALLĀH—*THE* Deity; that Supreme being who is ONE, the ETERNAL REFUGE of all. He is neither begotten nor begets. That is, He has no beginning, no end. HE, like unto whom there CAN BE NO OTHER! (*Ikhlāṣ*; Q 16)

3. **Inspiration, Illumination**—We heard, first, the majestic CALL to Call upon man in the name of the Supreme Master; the Order to Announce the advent of the Inspired Message. (*'Alaq*, Q 1). Then we heard the experience of Illumination related, vaguely, but as clearly as words can convey, a mystic experience to the non-illumined consciousness. We realized that such beatific lucidity of mind and blossoming of vision comes only after a life-time of seeking and surrender of the self. It is an experience of Peace after turmoil until the meaning of existence—the rhythm of the Universe—the Music of the Spheres—the Order pervading the Cosmos—all this is manifested. . like the breaking of the D A W N ! (*Qadr*, *Q* 2)

4 **Guidance**—This relation between the illumined individual human mind and the Omnipotent, Omnipresent THAT, then assumes a different form—it becomes the Inner Voice, offers consolation in the midst of discouragement, encourages the sagging spirit of the chosen man facing the heavy odds confronting him; guides him in his loneliness.

(*Kauthar*, Q 12, *Nasr*, Q 14, *Sharh*, *Q* 20; *Duhā* Q 12)

This Inner Voice also prompts him as to how he should avoid or extricate himself from the negative attitudes of doubt and fear and misgiving by seeking refuge in Him who is the Master of Men, the King of Men, the God of Men, for with HIM alone are courage and safety and peace. (*Falaq*, Q 17, *Nās*, Q 18)

5. **Reckoning**—There is the oft-repeated lesson of the Inevitable Reckoning. No human action, however, insignificant, goes unrecorded on the tablet of existence. It brings its reward or punishment, that is, its consequence,

in the form of well-being or misery. The accumulation of evil necessarily ends in an eruption· the social fabric bursts asunder often to the utter consternation of man. And then he realizes—often too late—what has involved him in the collective disaster.

(*Zalzalah*, Q. 3; *'Ādiyāt*, Q 4; *Qāri'ah*, Q. 5; *Takāthur*, Q 6; *Humaza*, Q 2; *Tīn*, Q 19; *Lail*, Q 22)

6. **Examples** are given of those that transgressed and brought down upon themselves the retribution that became due to them.

(*Fīl*, Q. 9, *Tīn*, Q 19; *Shams*, Q. 23; *Fajr*, Q. 25)

7. **The Wrong Path**—What are the actual transgressions which are deprecated in this early period?

First: Persecution is wrong. (*Fīl*, Q 9)

Second: Individual hoarding and perpetual competition are futile and detrimental to the social good. (*Takāthur*, Q. 6, *Humaza*, Q 8)

Third: Hypocrisy is despicable. Merely formal prayers, unaccompanied with sympathy towards fellow men, are worse than useless. (*Mā'ūn*, Q. 11)

8. **And what is the right Path ?** The answer is that Time itself is evidence—Men flounder on the way except those who have Faith in the Law of God, who engage in good works and leave behind examples of truth and perseverence (*'Asr*, Q 7). The right path is essentially one of sympathy and love for those human beings who are most in need of them—the orphan, the deprived, those who are poor or those who are lonely.

(*Mā'ūn*, Q 11; *Sharh*, Q. 20· *Duhā*, Q. 21: *Lail*, Q. 22; *Balad*, Q. 24; *Fajr*, Q. 25)

9. **Whom shall we take as our Guide ?**..The only true guide is within ourselves: the tiny lens through which our hearts see. He who keeps it bright and clear, burnished and sensitive, he it is who will be on the right road to prosperity. And he that allows it to accumulate rust or deliberately refuses to see through it, he it is who will suffer and be damned. (*Balad,* Q 24)

And this little Inner Voice, constantly prompts man to take the upward and difficult Path. But often, O so often, he takes the path of least resistance and tends to slide down lower and lower! (*Balad,* Q 24)

10. **Denunciations, ambiguities**—We also came across several denunciations of incorrigible individuals whose identity is thickly or thinly veiled (*Lahab,* Q 15, *'Alaq,* Q 1 · 6-19). Also we met instances of passages which are not clear, at least to this student, and needed the intuition of the poet rather than the erudition of the scholar to explain them. (*Humaza,* Q 8, *Balad,* Q 24)

11 **Withdrawal**—And, finally, we were shown the technique of dignified but courteous withdrawal when faced, not with those who cannot see but with those who *will* not see Even in this early stage of teaching we were told that at such times we should

Say....To you is your reckoning; to me, mine
(*Kāfirūn,* Q 13)

. . .

In these few paragraphs, an attempt has been made to summarize the message of these 25 Suras of the earliest period of Islamic teaching. Even to hope that this portion has been adequately summarized is to display one's utter ignorance of the depth and width of meaning which most words of the Qurān possess.

No, I have *not* succeeded. But success in explaining the Qurān or even a portion of it is not my aim. If I can succeed in convincing even one individual that here lies a still little-explored mine of universally applicable moral teaching and persuade him to carry this study further, I will have achieved all the success I have ever aspired to.

May He forgive where I have transgressed.



"But is there one who will pay heed?"
(LIV : 17)